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THE WOMAN OF THE IRON BRACELETS

BY

FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF

'FOLLY MORRISON,' 'HONEST DAVIE,' 'FETTERED FOR LIFE, ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

London

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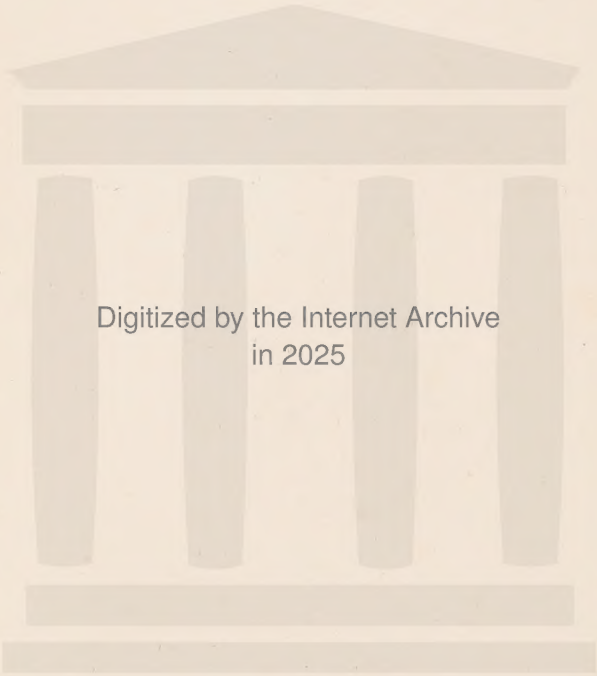
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THE WOMAN OF THE IRON BRACELETS

CHAPTER XXXII.

OCTOBER THIRTIETH TO NOVEMBER FIFTH.

I THINK that Mary overacted her part somewhat—but that the best actress may do at times, and it must be hard for a really good woman to represent an antipathetic character without exaggeration, even though it be with some premeditation. But it seemed strange to me that St. John, who had regarded her as the very incarnation of purity and unselfishness, should so readily accept this worldly representation of her character. But under the influence of passionate anger and

jealousy a man is in a poor condition to reason upon things; and then I reflected that I myself, with less cause, had suspected her of duplicity and venal motives. And even now I hardly knew what to believe. Had she, for her own ends, revealed nothing but the simple truth? Was she, under the pretence of striving to save Mrs. Lawson and Olive, actually seeking to capture Mr. Lawson for her own advantage? I could scarcely think this, and yet——

'My dear,' said I, going up to her, as she sat bending over her half-written letter, her elbows on the table and her temples clasped in her hands—'My dear, you didn't mean what you said to St. John just now?'

Before the words were scarcely spoken my heart was stricken with remorse; for Mary's sole response was a big tear that splashed down upon the page.

'Forgive me, Mary dear,' said I humbly.

'Am I to go on, or not?' she said, with distraction in her voice. 'Am I to blight his

love for me, or yield to it? Which would you have me do?' she sobbed, raising her flooded eyes to mine reproachfully.

'Go your own course, dear, and it must be wise and good—the wiser and better because it sometimes passes the comprehension of such an old fool as I.'

As I was going out, Mary gave me a letter to post. I had not to look at the address to know that it was directed to Mr. Lawson. Her courage had returned.

St. John has not entered the house since he left it this morning; but he is near the place, I know. When I turned out—after bidding Mary good-night—to see if it rained, I saw his big figure dimly through the drifting mist. He was in the broad path, close to the arbutus hedge, but he retreated as I approached, and was not to be seen when I reached the spot, and when, in a low voice, I called his name, there was no answer. Why is he wandering there like a disconsolate spirit? Does he intend to leave

England to-morrow, and is it thus he is passing his last night in the old spot? Has his heart softened towards Mary—does he think now and then of me, and this cosy room and its comforts, as he paces the sodden ground and bends before the raw east wind? This implies a weakness that his strong and manly disposition belies. I could rather believe—though I sicken at the thought—that some vengeful purpose is in his maddened heart—that he meditates striking the blow which shall save Mary from becoming the victim of Lawson's desires.

Yesterday passed without any disturbing incident. One trifling matter only gave me an uncomfortable reflection. In the garden, before lunch, Mary told me she had received a letter from Lawson, praying her to make an appointment where he could see her, if only for a few moments. And in reply to my question as to how her letters were delivered, now that Lawson dared not send

them openly, she told me that Morton brought them secretly. I was sorry to hear this, for it somewhat shakes the faith I have had in my man's integrity. He must receive bribes from Mr. Lawson to deceive me. To be sure, I don't know why we should expect such exceptional honesty in a servant when we look upon bribery and corruption in high places and amongst persons of better education and means as a mere matter of course. But one has an old-fashioned pride in believing one's own household impeccable. However, this knowledge is not without its advantages. It shows the necessity of being very careful what we say in the hearing of a man in the enemy's service. I wonder, by the way, if he overheard what passed in the interview between Mary and St. John the other morning. It is quite possible, for they spoke in unguarded tones, and it is not likely that Lawson, having the meanness to conspire with my man, would have any compunction in pumping him as to our private

affairs — especially those which affect his designs. Well, all that Morton could tell him of that scene would serve only to inspire him with greater hopes of winning Mary.

Respecting his letter, I asked Mary if she intended to grant his request.

'No,' said she slowly, with a reflective look in her eyes, 'not to-day. It is better for all of us that he should starve now and then. We must keep him hungry, that he may take the bait more eagerly when it is thrown to him. I have said that I am afraid of being seen by Mr. St. John. But I think that I shall go out to-morrow. I will call at the Court with the pretence of visiting Mrs. Lawson, just to make sure that Olive is there. Of course she is. If she were not, you would certainly have had a letter from her before now. Still, you would feel easier, wouldn't you, to know it for a fact?'

And when she came home this afternoon she told me that she had seen Olive gliding

into the morning-room as Mr. Lawson came forward to meet her.

We saw nothing of St. John yesterday, and this afternoon I came to the conclusion that he had beyond doubt overcome his irresolution and taken the wiser and stronger course of terminating the affair by immediate departure.

I think we were both oppressed by the sorrowful reflections that sprang from this belief, for as soon as we rose from dinner we went to our instruments with one accord, feeling that music alone could dispel our gloom. Then, when Mary was seated before the piano and I had my 'cello between my knees, we could find nothing to our taste but the most mournful melodies, so that my bow rasped out, as if in sympathy with my feelings, nought but the most dismal moaning and wailing imaginable.

'Well,' thought I, as we came to an end of our performance, 'if poor Hal were out there

now, he would for a sure thing acquit us of being very gay in his absence.'

And he was out there.

A letter came by last post this evening which I felt that I ought to answer immediately, so I went to my room for that purpose, leaving Mary at the piano. Just as I had finished this lengthy business the door opened, and Mary came in with a distressed face to tell me that Ann had seen St. John. I shrugged my shoulders, and stamped the envelope.

'Do you think it can be he?' she asked.

'I've no doubt of it, my dear. I myself saw him last night,' said I with a sigh.

'What can we do?' she murmured, sitting down and looking at me imploringly.

'Nothing. Left to himself, he will get over this in time. It is a moral sickness. When he recovers his strength he will be ashamed of such childishness.' I felt vexed with him for yielding thus to a weak and

morbid sentiment; but I think that only endeared him the more to Mary. It was a silent appeal to her womanly compassion for the suffering, and, remembering his manly vigour, this falling away was to her the more touching.

'It is terrible,' she said, 'to think of his wandering there alone—staying out in the darkness like an outcast, as if he had done some wrong.'

'He has done wrong. He behaved badly enough the other day, but he is behaving worse now, upsetting us in this way, as if we hadn't enough to bear without that. We haven't eaten one hearty meal these three days. It's abominable.'

Rising from her seat, she came to my side, slid her arm about my neck, and said, in her irresistible, caressing tone:

'Haven't we enough love to forgive him that? Should we be unhappy if we did not know that he must be still more wretched? Go out and fetch him, dear.'

'No, no—not I. I'll not encourage his weakness by showing myself weaker still.'

'See, he left his pipe here,' she continued, taking no heed of my objection. 'How can a man bear up without his pipe? Men are not like girls, who can have a good cry and be done with it. We are only withies that bend under the storm and spring up again none the worse for it. But the great oaks and the elms, dear, see how they are torn and bruised. How terrible the passionate tempest is for them! If you feel for inanimate things—and you do—you must feel for him. See!' she added, rising with alacrity and fetching his pipe, 'I will put it here on the chimney-piece where he left it. That will make it seem to him almost as if nothing had happened.'

Then, with the same brisk eagerness, she set the spirit-stand on the table, drew the arm-chair round towards the fire, while I—pretending to take no notice of these preparations—frowned as I addressed my letter; and finally

she brought me my hat, and put it on with a light laugh and a kiss.

'Well,' said I, 'I'll take this to the post-box, and if I see him——'

'You will make him come in, and have a long, reasoning talk. I am going up to my room at once. You will see no more of me till breakfast-time to-morrow morning.'

Returning from the post, I met St. John, pacing slowly under the dripping chest-nuts.

'Hal, my man! what the deuce are you doing here?' I asked, assuming a tone of astonishment.

'Watching,' he replied, with savage brusquerie.

'Watching for whom?'

'The wolf.'

'Nonsense. It isn't likely that Mary would make an appointment with anyone at this hour.'

'I'll make sure of it.'

'For heaven's sake be reasonable. Mary

has gone to bed. Come inside, and let's talk the matter over like rational beings.'

'I'm not in a humour to listen to reason. Leave me alone. I shall stay here while there's a light in the house.'

'This is unworthy of you, Hal; it's unmanly.'

'What of that—if I choose to be a brute? Look: if I may not have her, that other brute shan't; no, by the Lord!' he muttered, turning away.

It was useless to remonstrate with him. Time only can cure him of this folly.

Hearing me come in alone, Mary presently entered my room stealthily, in her dressing-gown, to know if I had seen him. She listened in grave silence as I told her what had passed between us.

'We can do no good. We must let him alone,' said I in conclusion.

She shook her head in dissent.

'No; we must do something to put an end to this.'

She sat for some time in deep reflection, but when she rose and bade me again good-night, I fancied by the bright expression of her face that some expedient had already dawned upon her mind to put an end to St. John's vigils. What the expedient is, to-morrow may show.

We spent the early part of this evening in reading. The pattering of the rain upon the veranda set me wondering whether St. John was keeping watch over the house, when Mary, looking up from her book, asked me what time it was.

'Half-past eight, my dear,' said I, looking at my watch. 'Would you like a little music?'

'No,' she replied calmly. 'I asked the time because I made an appointment to meet Mr. Lawson at nine.'

I looked at her incredulously for a moment, and then gasped, 'Where?'

'In Mill Lane.'

'When did you make this appointment?' I asked in growing terror.

'This morning. Mr. Lawson sent me a letter, by the usual means, asking me to see him, and—and I acceded to his request.'

'But, good gracious, Mary! St. John is about the place somewhere, we may be sure. If he encounters Lawson——'

'I hope he may,' she said fervently. 'If jealousy can stir his spirit—if this encounter can lead him to go further—to do his duty towards his mother and Olive——'

'And what part do you intend to take in this dangerous business?'

'None. I have a very good excuse for not keeping my appointment in Mr. St. John being there. Besides, if they meet, it will probably be before nine. Mr. Lawson is a punctual man.'

'You haven't reflected on the possible consequences, Mary,' said I, rising. 'Heaven only knows to what extreme of violence St. John may proceed.'

I looked at my watch again, and finding it was now twenty minutes to nine, I hastily

left the room, clapped on my hat, and went out softly into the garden. Approaching the hedge that runs down beside Mill Lane, I stepped upon the garden-seat, and peeped up towards the lamp at the corner. A shining umbrella was passing beneath it. Down the lane came that umbrella with the slow and measured pace of a man keeping an appointment, and conscious of being a little before his time. It passed beneath me, almost within arm's reach, and slowly disappeared in the deeper obscurity of the lane; then, after a minute or two, reappeared and passed beneath me again, the man's slow step just audible on the spongy path. Under the lamp the glistening umbrella turned and came steadily back. But just beyond me it paused suddenly by the little wicket-gate as a quick, heavy step crunched the soft gravel. My pulse beat quicker as, glancing up the valley, I perceived a bulky figure coming down, which I recognised at once as St. John's. Lawson's pulse, I imagine, must have stopped

altogether as he made the same discovery, and stood there waiting for the inevitable.

On came St. John with that heavy menacing stride, and halted within a pace of the umbrella.

'Ah, my dear Mr. St. John!' exclaimed Lawson in a high-pitched voice that betrayed his apprehension. 'Who would have thought of meeting you here?'

'Not you, for one,' answered St. John fiercely. 'Down with that hand. D'ye think I'll take it? What do you do here?'

'Well, Mr. St. John, since you adopt this very aggressive tone, you compel me to reply that my presence here does not concern you.'

'That's no reply. What are you doing here, I ask? Come, out with your excuse!'

'I—I—I do not find it necessary to offer an excuse, sir.'

'I do, and a good one, too. One that shall convince me you have no design here to blast the life of another woman as you have my mother's and my sister's.'

'Really, Mr. St. John——'

'Your excuse. Out with it, or march!'

'Positively, I—I——' stammered Mr. Lawson.

'March, and think yourself lucky to escape a thrashing so cheaply. And listen: if I catch you here again after dusk I'll send you home with such a skinful of bruised bones that you'll have no wish to put your foot out of doors for a month to come.'

Mr. Lawson, murmuring feeble remonstrance, moved on slowly.

'Quicker, rascal, quicker!' cried St. John, with the hoarseness of controlled passion. 'Quicker, or you'll tempt me to give you a foretaste of what you deserve.'

The umbrella moved more and more rapidly, till, nearing the top of the lane, Lawson fairly broke into a run; but in turning the corner to the right—with a view to seeking sanctuary in the village—he was pulled up sharp by St. John, who was close upon his heels.

'Not that way!' he cried, in a voice that reached my ears even at that distance. 'There's the road to Ightham, rascal—take it.'

I heard no response, but I saw the shimmering umbrella move quickly off to the left, and when I withdrew, St. John was still standing on guard under the lamp.

I confess I was heartily glad that the affair ended thus, but Mary was less satisfied with the result.

'After all, he has only frightened Mr. Lawson,' she said despondingly, when I had told her what I have written here.

'What would you have him do, my dear—thrash the man?'

'Yes, within an inch of his life,' she said with a revengeful expression.

'On what pretext? Lawson has as much right to be in the lane as St. John.'

'Mr. St. John himself gave a sufficient reason. Isn't it enough that Mr. Lawson has ruined the happiness of his mother and sister? Oh, if Mr. St. John had been thinking of

Olive instead of me he wouldn't have confined himself to threats ; he would have beaten that man and taken possession of the Court by now. In that way, at one stroke, he might have put an end to this tedious business, which must now go dragging on until Lawson commits himself by some weak act. How long may we have to wait for that with a man calculating and crafty, armed with suspicion, and not likely to slip by taking a hasty step ? Poor Mr. St. John !' she added, after an interval of silence. 'If he could only free himself from this infatuation and get me out of his thoughts! If I could only make him despise me !'

'You have done your best, my dear Mary.'

'But we must do more,' she said with resolution ; and then, after another interval of reflection, 'However, this fright may lead to something. We shall see.'

This day has come and gone without any material development resulting from the affair

of last night—that is, so far as I can judge ; but Mary seems not at all dissatisfied with the progress of events. She received a letter from Lawson before I was down, and this she showed to me after breakfast.

He wrote in terrible anxiety with regard to the resentment he conceived she might very properly entertain in finding that he was not in Mill Lane at the appointed hour last night, to disabuse her mind of any misconception as to the cause of that failure to keep his engagement, which, he assured her, was a thousandfold more distressing to himself than it could be vexatious to her. As a matter of fact, he had been at the appointed rendezvous rather before than after the time arranged for this meeting, and had there been attacked in a most savage and ungentlemanly manner by Mr. St. John, whose outrageous violence had compelled him most unwillingly to withdraw from the spot as the only means of precluding a public scandal. 'It seems,' he continued, 'as if all the members of this

family, with which I am so unhappily united by a purely legal bond, are afflicted with insanity. It affords me some relief, however, to know that Olive has escaped the pitfall which poor Dr. Harvey, with his mistaken views and deplorable habit of meddling with affairs beyond his comprehension, unwittingly laid for her. The poor girl, with a re-awakened sense of filial duty, which cannot be overlooked, has returned home, for which I thank merciful Providence with a most joyful heart. For what would now have been her condition had she not at the last moment freed herself from the influence of her wretched brother? She tells me that he proposed to take her to America; but how little he intended to execute that wild project may now be judged by his present mad conduct. If he considers that his sister has been coerced, that she is staying beside her unhappy mother contrary to her own inclinations, and that she is miserable here, why has he not come like a man to make a thorough investi-

gation and exercise his rights as a son and a brother? I am happy to tell you that poor Olive is calmer and quite reasonable; Mrs. Lawson also, though far from robust, and still peculiar in many little ways, is tranquil in mind and as well in body as I can expect her to be in this sad decline, which I fear must shortly end in dissolution. I deviate from the main purpose of my letter, dearest Miss Smith, by these particulars respecting Mrs. Lawson and Olive in the hope—the ardent hope—that you may be induced to call upon us—if only for the sake of these two poor ladies who have so tender a regard for you. While that wretched man, Mr. St. John, is in this neighbourhood, I feel it would be unkind to ask you to meet me anywhere but here. I could not, I would not, expose you to such a scene of brutal violence as that of last night'; and so forth through three more pages.

While I was reading this Mary wrote her answer.

'Of course I accept your explanation,' she wrote coldly, 'and the more readily as I myself have been a witness of Mr. St. John's uncontrollable passion. You know I thought the affair was all over; but, unhappily, that unfortunate *rencontre* the other day has excited his jealousy to such a pitch that I am positively afraid of him. I want someone to advise me, for my position here is becoming every day more precarious. My relations with Dr. Harvey are somewhat strained in consequence of his dislike to you, and the discovery that letters have been frequently passing between us. I am fully convinced that he sometimes suspects me of duplicity——' Here glancing at Mary, who had given me this letter to read, I found her regarding me sidelong, the tip of her quill between her white teeth, and a malicious twinkle in her eye. I dropped my eyes and went on reading —'and mistrust is very nearly allied to dislike.

'I should like to visit Mrs. Lawson and Olive; but in view of Dr. Harvey's hostility

how can I ask him to accompany me; what excuse can I make for calling, and how can I be sure that Mrs. Lawson and Olive will be glad to see me?'

Mary's answer was sent covertly, and an hour afterwards Mrs. Lawson's coachman brought openly the letter Mary had angled for. It was written by Olive, in the most affectionate terms, begging Mary to call upon her.

'Do you think that was dictated?' I asked.

'In substance, yes; but this writing is natural, and this pleasant feeling unassumed. Oh, Mr. Lawson will take care that I am not frightened from visiting at the Court by any exhibition of unkindly dislike on their part!'

'Hum!' said I, not to say more, for this was touching upon that incomprehensible subject which never failed to irritate me.

'And so for their sakes,' added Mary, 'I think I will go there. I shall at least see Olive, and while we can keep Mr. Lawson in

this mood Mrs. Lawson and Olive will be left in tranquillity.'

'Well, well, my dear, as you think fit. Shall you go to the Court this afternoon?'

'No; not to-day. We must not seem too eager; we must have a little more persuasion.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NOVEMBER TENTH.

I HAVE seen nothing of St. John since the affair with Lawson last week. Every evening I have gone out once or twice at odd times to see if he was about the house, and, neither seeing him nor hearing of him, I began to hope that his jealous fear had subsided, and that, conscious of the hopelessness and folly of his passion, he had carried out his project of emigrating, to sever himself for ever from the past. And yet it seemed unlike him too, having come to his senses, to go without making amends for the pain he had given us, and setting our minds at ease with regard to him. And in his normal condition he would not shun this course because it involved an

admission of past weakness ; no, the feeling that he had reason to be ashamed of himself would only serve as an incentive to meet us face to face and acknowledge his faults. The only alternative to this was one which I dared not contemplate as a possibility ; yet it was not without a shrinking dread that I said to myself, ' Harry would never do that. Be he never so beside himself with despairing love, never so shaken by the dread prospect of misery and desolation, he would still scorn the means of escaping from responsibilities which a coward seeks in suicide.'

However, an end was put to my doubts on this subject this afternoon.

After protracting Lawson's suspense to the utmost, Mary accepted this afternoon a second pressing invitation from Olive. I walked with her to Ightham ; but coming within sight of the Court, I stopped, for there was Mr. Lawson at the gate waiting to receive Mary. Seeing us, he came forward, his beaming smile visible even at that distance.

'Am I to speak to him, Mary?' I asked, uncertain as to what I ought to do.

'No; it will be more in keeping with what I have said if you shake hands with me, and turn your back on him.'

'With all my heart,' said I; and having shaken hands with her I was about to show my back to Mr. Lawson, when out from the coppice beside us stalked St. John, looking as ragged and wild as a man of the woods. Lawson was no more than a dozen paces from us. At sight of St. John he stopped dead short, his smile turning to a look of blank terror. Mary, as usual, maintained her perfect composure, and met St. John's regard with undaunted courage as he stood in her path.

'Where are you going?' he asked, in a tone of command.

'I am going to see your mother and sister, Mr. St. John,' she answered with pointed emphasis, adding with quiet dignity, in assertion of her right to control her own actions :

'And anyone else whom it may please me to visit. Let me pass, if you please.'

Harry stepped out of her way with an ill grace and in sullen silence, averting his eyes that he might not see Lawson's triumph as he offered Mary his hand.

'My dear fellow—Hal, my boy,' said I, putting my hand on his arm in gentle remonstrance. He jerked my hand off with a hoarse laugh, and, quitting my side, marched away as if this last blow had decided him upon a long-debated course, and in two minutes he had turned the angle of the road and was out of sight.

Lawson brought Mary home about six. When I heard the brougham in the drive, I went into my room that I might not meet the man. He left Mary at the door, and went away, quaking with fear, I hear.

'Have you seen anything more of St. John?' I asked, when Mary came to me.

'No; nothing has happened. What became of him after we parted?'

I told her how he had left me.

'You did not tell him that Olive had gone back—that it was in his power to rescue her?'

'To tell the truth, my dear, I was so upset by his unexpected appearance and his wild look, that I could find never a reasonable word to say at the moment, and ere I could collect my wits he was gone. But I should have told him all; I feel sure of that, now, by this feeling of regret that stirs my heart when I think of my silence—I ought to have told him not only what I know, but what I fear. and I would have urged him for your sake, as well as his mother's and Olive's, to take the vigorous course you indicated the other night —yes, and the truth about Lawson I should have revealed. But as I tell you, Mary, I had barely offered a couple of words of remonstrance, before he broke away from me.'

'Perhaps it is as well,' said Mary, sitting down with a sigh, and drawing off her gloves. 'As we have seen in Olive's case, it isn't enough merely to sunder the poor things from

Lawson—they must be kept apart, and no opportunity of exercising his influence upon them must be suffered; even an accident—like that of our meeting at the station—has to be guarded against. And is Mr. St. John in a condition to keep such strained watch and ward upon them? I fear not.'

'Ay, truly, my dear. 'Tis not to be expected that anything could take you entirely out of his mind. When I was a poor student, I've had my pocket picked again and again while I was dipping into the volumes on a bookstall. And while he was thinking of you, a clever rascal like Lawson might readily enough rob him of his advantage.'

'I thought this—and yet the temptation to end all by one stroke——'

'Desperate ills need desperate remedies. Yes, yes. Well, Mary dear, and how did you find them—Mrs. Lawson and Olive?'

'As I expected, perfectly calm and reasonable, within certain limits. But there is something painful even in their restraint. They

do not seem to me like living women, but puppets moving in obedience to another will that have just enough resemblance to humanity to impress one with a feeling of regret. Mrs. Lawson still refuses to see Olive.'

'What do you conclude from that, my dear?'

'That Mr. Lawson has not abandoned his original intention. If we lose our hold on him, Mrs. Lawson will die, and he will marry Olive. But how long must this go on?' she exclaimed in a low tone, knitting her brows with an expression of weariness and impatience that I have remarked for the first time. 'Shall we succeed in doing more than this? Who will weary first, we or he?'

'He shows no signs of weariness, hang him!'

'No; but still, the precarious condition of Mrs. Lawson's health must make him anxious, that is evident; and then there is his dread of Mr. St. John. He would be glad to end it all, but while his infatuation lasts he dare not——'

'For fear of losing you.'

She inclined her head in silence — then smoothing her gloves, she said :

'They have asked me to go to the South with them.'

'Who—Olive?'

'Yes—of course, by the direction of Mr. Lawson, though they are ignorant of that.'

'What, ignorant that he told them to ask you?'

'Yes. Both pressed me to go with them, and separately—as Olive was not in the room while I was with Mrs. Lawson — but each spoke as if it was a spontaneous idea.'

'Hum!'

'They talk of going in a fortnight's time. And for their sakes, I suppose I ought to go with them.'

'You ought to do nothing of the kind,' I cried stoutly. 'You shall do nothing of the kind with my consent. Would you throw yourself under the sinister and subtle influence of that villain in some sunny pleasure resort

of the Riviera, where everything conduces to yielding and laxity? What happened to Olive at Whitby shall not befall you in the South with my consent. Nay, rather than suffer you to rush to your own destruction in that way—even though it be to save others—I will take sides with poor Hal; search for him, and, if necessary, get his aid to avert such a calamity by any means that may be found.'

I spoke with unusual vehemence, but the only effect it had upon Mary was to bring a little smile to her lips. My manner, indeed, might have justified her in concluding that I had also come under that infatuation which has turned the heads of Lawson and St. John. She might even have conceived that jealousy of Lawson was the seat of my disorder: but it was not these suppositions (as I found out afterwards) that animated her.

'In that case,' said she demurely, 'I had better write to Mr. Lawson and tell him so without delay.'

'Do, by all means, my dear,' said I, rising;

'but first let us go to dinner, and turn our thoughts awhile to something pleasant.'

After our repast she wrote her letter, and brought it to me with mock humility, for even in the midst of tragedy, as it were, her sense of humour is quick.

'My dear Mr. Lawson,' she wrote,

'I have taken the very earliest opportunity of approaching Dr. Harvey on the subject we discussed in the carriage. But at the first intimation of my desire to accompany poor Mrs. Lawson and Olive to the South he flew into the most violent passion imaginable —indeed, I have never before seen him so extremely agitated or so passionately angry. He imputes motives to you which I cannot possibly repeat, and had he the courage of his convictions I have no doubt he would accuse me of selfishness and heartless ingratitude in wishing to leave him. He has forbidden me in the strongest terms to accept your kind and most generous offer, and even threatens

to find Mr. St. John, and aid him in any measure, no matter how violent and unlawful, that may separate us. As I am perfectly dependent on Dr. Harvey I must of necessity submit to his authority. So there can be no San Remo for your poor little Mary; and truly I doubt if I shall be permitted ever again to visit the Court after this terrible scene, for Dr. Harvey distinctly told me that even the happiness of Mrs. Lawson and Olive should not serve as a pretext for any further intimacy between you and me. And now, taking all these things into consideration, my dear Mr. Lawson, I am compelled to think that we ought to correspond no more. I am alone in the world, and must regard my own interests, unpleasant as it is to acknowledge such a selfish consideration. You know that Dr. Harvey is a man of his word; and I tremble to think of my fate if he should actually carry out his threat with regard to Mr. St. John. I refused Mr. St. John's hand on the ground that I could not reconcile

myself to poverty; but it is quite possible that Dr. Harvey, in the stubborn pursuit of his purpose, may overcome that objection by making over a considerable portion of his fortune to "dear Hal."

'I have scarcely room for more than one last word—and indeed I have no heart to write more than this brief—farewell.

'M. S.'

'Shall I send it?' asked Mary, as I looked up with a long face.

I balanced the letter in my hand a minute or two as I reflected on the consequences of the decision I had to make. It seemed to me that this letter would certainly close the correspondence between Mary and Lawson, and with that must end all hope of her achieving the end she had been striving for. Awed by the violence of my objection, Mary had decided to abandon her design—that is, if I sanctioned the despatch of this letter. Putting the case clearly before me, I had by

one word to pronounce Mrs. Lawson and Olive's doom or Mary's destruction. At that I could not hesitate a moment.

'You shall send this letter, Mary,' said I.

She took the letter, enclosed it in an envelope, and sent it to the post without a word.

But now, as I reconsider the letter (which I have set down here to the best of my remembrance), I begin to doubt whether Mary's design is so surely overthrown as I at first imagined—whether she has not artfully turned my passion to account and provided herself with a new weapon of attack. That subtle confession of self-seeking was surely not made without set purpose.

I was not mistaken in the supposition with which I closed my notes last night. This morning, as soon as she had a chance of communicating with me, when we were not likely to be observed by Morton or others, she took a letter from her pocket and put it in my

hands with a triumphant smile, as she bade me read it. It was from Lawson, and began thus :

'*You* call yourself my poor Mary : let me call you my own darling Mary.'

This took my breath away, but that which followed was even more audacious. In plain words he implored her to defy my commands, to free herself from thraldom, escape the fate that inevitably awaited her in marrying a man like St. John, tainted with the madness of his family ; to follow the dictates of her heart, and accept a home in that sunny South where she would be secure from the vindictive malevolence of a maniac and the unsupportable tyranny of an old idiot, and that she might be freed for ever from any feeling of dependence, he offered to settle an income of £500 a year upon her for life.

He did not say what he expected in return for this settlement : but his meaning was too obvious to need that.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NOVEMBER SEVENTEENTH.

Mary took the letter from me and read it through again with such evident satisfaction that I turned my eyes away with those painful feelings of regret and pity that the sight of depravity strikes into one's heart.

'Now, what shall I say in reply to this?' she said reflectively, as she refolded the letter.

'Say!' said I indignantly—'nothing. Cannot you see the meaning of his offer? It's a gross insult.'

'Yes, I suppose it is,' she acquiesced, her head inclined a little on one side, her eyes fixed on the ground, but not a semblance of offended pride in her voice or manner as she

slowly drew the folds of the letter between her finger and thumb.

'Tear that letter in a dozen pieces, and send him back the fragments without a word!' I suggested angrily.

'Oh, I cannot afford that,' said she, looking up with a smile; and, my indignation seeming rather to provoke a spirit of rebellion in her than to induce humility, she continued: 'He offers me five hundred pounds a year for life.'

'For what? Does he offer anything that you can accept with honour?'

'If an honest man asked me to be his wife, could I accept that offer with honour?'

I could find no answer to this, and she went on, with still more accentuated sarcasm in her tone:

'What right have such women as I to cavil at form or take offence at an indignity? We must pay for our misfortunes and indemnify ourselves by making the most profitable use of the small advantages left us. Five hundred pounds a year seems a great

deal to me,' she murmured, lapsing into a calculating mood; 'but I don't think I will accept it.'

'Of course you won't. I could see you were jesting, my dear.'

'Oh, I am not at all in jest! In right down earnest, Doctor. I shall refuse this offer, with a view to getting a better. I think I must have Jewish blood in me. Possession never satisfies me—it merely excites a desire to get more. And I will get more,' she added, rising with determination in the quick energy of the movement. 'No one makes an offer of this kind without the intention of paying more, if necessary.'

I still believed that she was playing with words to punish me for the lack of confidence she had discovered in my bearing; but it shocked me to find that she could be playful upon such a subject, and talk of honour lightly.

'I have written my answer,' she said, about half an hour later, meeting me with an un-

closed letter in her hand. 'I don't think you will like it; but I am perfectly willing to let you read it. I want to be as honest as I can.'

I took the letter with a stiff little bow, feeling vexed by her flippancy, and read:

'My dear Mr. Lawson,

'Your letter quite frightens me. What have I done to merit so much kindness? How can I reply without wounding your feelings by seeming ingratitude and failure to appreciate your generosity? I feel that I must reply at once, that my reasons for declining your offer may not appear to be the result of cold calculation, or indicate any indecision on my part as to the course I should take. It is only right that you should know these reasons, and I will confess them without reserve, as they occur to me now. In the first place, I have to consider how Mrs. Lawson and Olive would regard this arrangement. Would they approve it? And

if they did not, would it be possible for me to live under the same roof with them? You will say that with the very liberal allowance you place at my disposal it would be possible to secure a house for myself; but how could I accept such assistance from you without incurring very serious suspicion? I am not a child, my dear Mr. Lawson, and I am quite aware that, innocent as our relations might be, the gravest misconstruction would be put upon our intimacy, rendering my position not only painful, but absolutely perilous. You have told me that Mrs. Lawson might die suddenly at any moment, and if her death necessitated public inquiry, might not the discovery of our relations throw suspicion of foul play upon me—or even upon you?

'And even if you could banish all these fears from my mind, I should still hesitate to take the step you advise; for how can I hope that you will always feel so kindly towards me as you do at the present? I have many faults, many more than you have seen in our

interviews, when I have naturally presented myself in my best colours—and when you discover these, must you not cease to respect and like me? Then, losing your esteem and friendship (which alone would justify me in accepting pecuniary assistance from you), what would become of me? I have absolutely no other friend in the world to rely on, save Dr. Harvey, and were I to leave him now, I should never dare to face him again. And so, dear Mr. Lawson, though it grieves me sorely, I must beg you to write to me no more. I am convinced that Dr. Harvey is aware that we still correspond—though whence he draws his information I cannot tell ; and he has not the art to conceal his growing mistrust, and this feeling has obtained such an ascendancy over him that he regards me with suspicion, even when I am most candid and truthful in my dealings with him. The only way in which I can restore his confidence, and secure my position as his little housekeeper, is to close this dangerous correspondence ; and for this

reason I must beg you to grant my request—the last, perhaps, of your poor

'MARY.'

'There is one part of this letter I agree with, at any rate,' said I happily, 'and that's the conclusion.'

'And the rest?' she asked, taking the letter from me.

'Well, there, Mary, it's hard for me to distinguish between truth and artifice; but it seems to me that one undoes the other. You begin by pretending simplicity, and go on to show a degree of worldly calculation that belies it.'

'You think that may lead him to suspect that I am only scheming for a better assurance of my future welfare than his promise of five hundred a year?'

'Yes, I do, most decidedly.'

'That is exactly what I want him to conclude,' said she, wetting the flap of the envelope with her finger, and closing it.

Mary's sarcasms rankled in my mind all the morning, and for this reason—there was truth in them. I could not rid myself of the suspicion that she was cheating me, as she was cheating Lawson, and with this unpleasant addition—that I was being fooled even more than he was. Well, this is not all my own weakness, for if a man sits down to a game of hazard and tells you with a wink that he can cut the king four times in succession, I'll defy you to avoid looking askant at the cards he deals. However, after lunch, Mary came laughing down the garden with a big apron on, her skirts tucked up, and in a pair of Dutch clogs she had found in the lumber-room (looking as coquettish and charming as any picture I have ever seen) to help me sweep up the fallen leaves, and in this occupation she so won upon me by her sprightliness and sweet good-humour, that I felt I must forgive and still love her, even though she was as bad as suspicion could paint her.

The week has slipped away, and nothing has occurred since I last wrote (Wednesday) worthy of noting. There has been no further communication between Lawson and Mary, and we have neither seen nor heard anything of St. John, and though naturally I have felt anxious and uneasy about poor Hal, I must confess that I have thoroughly enjoyed this period of relaxation. I must set down, however, an event that happened to-day, which seems to me pregnant with possibilities of a most uncomfortable kind.

First of all, though, I would observe that this interval of inaction has been less agreeable to Mary than to me, and the silence of Mr. Lawson, which has given me such satisfaction, has perplexed and alarmed her.

'No letter yet,' she said one morning (Thursday, I think); 'I cannot understand it.'

'Why, my dear, you begged the man to write no more, and he has acceded to your request—thank Heaven!' I added, *sotto voce*.

'But it isn't natural that he should,' said she, knitting her pretty brow. 'My letter invited a reply. It is not natural that he should abandon a project, merely at a transparent bidding like mine. I cannot explain it.'

'I can, my dear, easily enough. The rascal's frightened. He daren't stir out of the house for fear of St. John. Avarice prevents him clapping down the lump sum you were trying for. That hint of yours about a public inquiry into the possible sudden death of Mrs. Lawson throwing suspicion upon him has had effect; and all combined have led him to think that the game is not worth the candle, and that perhaps after all honesty is the better policy. It's as plain as a pikestaff,' and then, as she shook her head at my conclusions, I said:

'Well, my clever Mary—what construction do you put upon his silence?'

'I feel sure that he has not abandoned his purpose—only changed the mode of attack

to suit the circumstances. Avarice may have something to do with it; but it does not account for everything. If he could gain his end without incurring so much risk, he certainly would; but I can think of nothing that would deter him from making a promise which he could break with impunity.'

'You may depend upon it I am right, Mary. You have tired him out. He no longer sees the fun of bribing Morton and getting wet through, and running the risk of being strangled by St. John; and he's just going to leave you severely alone.'

'Yes; that's evident—but for how long?'

Mary's prognostication troubled me little enough then; but I am now inclined to think that it is only too likely to be verified ere long.

Mary and I were setting bulbs this afternoon when Morton came to say that a patient wished to see me.

'He do not look like a first-class patient, sir, so I've told him to wait in the 'all.'

'Very good; when you hear my bell, you can bring him into my room.'

Presently I left Mary in the garden, and went into the house. The patient was talking to Morton, in a low confidential tone, almost inaudible to me as I passed from the passage to my room. There was nothing in this to excite suspicion, for poor patients like to discuss their ailments with anyone, and all for some inscrutable reason drop their voices almost to a whisper while waiting to be called into the consulting-room. I rang my bell, and Morton ushered in a little wizened old man, hobbling with the aid of two walking-sticks, and groaning at every step He paused at the door to raise his knuckle to his forehead with a piteous expression on his drawn, meagre face, all puckered with wrinkles, as I conceived, by long suffering. Then, advancing to the table, he said :

'I dootifully ask your pardon, sir, but I am told you give advice for nothink.'

'Ay, ay, to be sure I do on Mondays.

However, you shan't be made to pay for coming a day or so before your time, so sit you down there, and let me know what is the matter with you.'

With many a painful grunt he seated himself in the chair I indicated on the opposite side of the table, I sitting as usual with my back to the window, the better to examine my patient's features, on which the light falls.

'I fail to recognise you,' said I; 'you don't live in the village, do you?'

'No, sir; my name's Edards—fish-porter at Billingsgate by trade; but these here rheumatics has thrown me out of employ, 'bleeging me to throw myself on the support of my son-in-law, George, as drives one of Mr. Mist's flies at Ightham—hard on him, bein' a poor man—but my daughter can't abide the notion of my going into the union—'spect it'll come to that, though—most of us does when the wet gets into our bones a porterin' fish—rain, blow, or snow, year in and year

out. But if you can give me a trifle o' stuff or a box of 'intment, or even a gargle as'll give us a bit o' rest in the night, Lord knows I'll be grateful.'

Whilst he ran on thus with a little groan, now and then, his back bent, his head buried in his shoulders, rocking himself perpetually backward and forward as he rubbed his knees, I observed that his eyes, which were particularly keen and bright, never rested for two moments on the same object; his furtive glance shot up and down to the right and to the left, and seemed to take in everything within its range. This, also, is a characteristic habit of some patients suffering acute pain, and I should have attached no importance to it but that, as I was putting the usual questions to him respecting his malady, he interrupted me to ask if he might be allowed to 'shift his chair,' as the light hurt his eyes, which had been 'monstrous tetchy' since he got the water in his bones. Then, when he had turned his

chair to another angle, he began to rock himself as before; but now I noticed that his glance scarcely wandered with the movement of his head from the floor and the cabinet in the corner. What was there in that to fix his attention? He could see nothing of its contents, for the door was closed—I am sure of that, for with this question in my mind I noticed that I had left the key in the lock. These trifles gave me no concern at the time, but were brought to my recollection forcibly by after-occurrences.

When I had got all the particulars of his ailment, I left the room to fetch a bottle of embrocation from the closet where I keep medicaments for my poor patients. I could not have been gone two minutes, for the closet is only on the other side of the passage in the recess under the staircase, and the bottle was close at hand, but in that brief interval I heard a peculiar metallic sound coming from my room. Edwards was picking up his stick, which had fallen on the floor, when I returned.

But that could not have caused such a sound as reached my ear.

The old fellow rose and took the embrocation with many thanks, and asked if he might be allowed to call again when it was gone.

'Certainly,' said I, ringing the bell for Morton; 'come on Tuesday afternoon.'

He left the room, and, still perplexed by my unsatisfied curiosity with regard to that metallic clink, I glanced round the room to see if anything was missing—for my poor patients, I am sorry to say, are not always honest. Then I discovered that the door of the cabinet was ajar. Could that crippled old man have been tempted by curiosity to open it in my absence? The nimblest man, it seemed to me, could hardly cross the room and get back to his chair in the small space of time between that sound and my return to the room. What had fallen in there? Opening the door, I found Mary's handcuffs lying on the shelf below the hook on which they usually hung.

CHAPTER XXXV.

NOVEMBER SEVENTEENTH TO NINETEENTH.

Had some reverberation caused the 'bracelets to fall on the shelf, and in so doing thrown the door partly open, or had Edwards taken advantage of my absence to run to the cabinet, open the door, and take down the handcuffs? The former hypothesis necessitated a very remarkable reverberation; the latter, only considerable nimbleness and duplicity on the part of Edwards. Hanging the 'bracelets' up in the most favourable position for being shaken down, I found that no movement of the cabinet displaced them. This forced me to conclude that Edwards had certainly been fingering them, when possibly they slipped from the hook; and then, alarmed by the

accident, he sped back to his chair and hit upon the expedient of taking up his stick to divert suspicion from the actual cause of the sound that reached my ear. But granting that curiosity had led him to examine the cabinet, what had excited this feeling? why had he pitched upon these handcuffs for closer examination? There were many things, even to a vulgar eye, of greater interest on the shelves, and undoubtedly of more value, had he any notion of committing a theft. And at first this incident suggested robbery as a chief motive. For it was clear as day that if he actually performed this feat of activity, his illness was assumed, and he was as free from rheumatism as I. If he had not come to rob me—and circumstances discountenanced that idea—what had he come for?

'It's a stupid thing to keep them here,' said I to myself, taking the 'bracelets' down and looking at them; 'a still more stupid thing to leave the key in the door. It cannot be pleasant to Mary, if occasion takes her to the

cabinet, to have this memento staring her in the face.'

This reflection called back to my memory the scene in which I had drawn her attention to these fetters, and from musing on this incident, my mind wandered to others, which, rounding into natural sequence by some mental process, formed a chain of evidence that connected my rheumatic patient with the iron 'bracelets' in a very remarkable manner.

'Good heavens!' thought I. 'What if this Edwards is a detective put upon Mary's track by that lawyer, Parsons!'

I sat down to think the matter out, with the 'bracelets' in my hand. By the aid of this, and a startling light that had flashed upon me, and to get at the truth, I attacked the subject in the Socratic method.

'What motive had Parsons for hunting down Mary? He professed to be acting for her own advantage. Does that seem possible? No. Who instigated him? Olive. Why?

Because at that time she was madly jealous of Mary. How did she come to suspect Mary of being an escaped criminal? Possibly by seeing some advertisement for a missing young woman last seen handcuffed in a compartment of the train wrecked at Wayford Junction, and by connecting Mary's instalment in my house with the fact that I was in that disaster. Did anyone else know that you were there? No; not at that time; but it is possible that since then Olive has betrayed the secret to her step-father. Have I ever told her anything about these "bracelets"? No. Has Lawson any knowledge of them or their history? Not that I am aware of. Tax your memory, old fellow; make sure of your facts. Lawson has poked about the bookshelves more than once, to be sure. Has he ever seen the inside of that cabinet? No. Who has, beside yourself and Mary? Well, possibly Morton has, as I have been rather careless about the key. Does he know the history of those handcuffs? No. Wait; now

I come to think of it, there's just the possibility that he does; for that night I spoke about them to Mary he did just come inside the room. Ha! that's an important fact. Is it possible that he would tell Lawson, if he knew, that Mary had worn those irons? I really do not think he would, for no one could show more devotion to his mistress than he to Mary; still, it is possible, for he certainly receives bribes from Lawson, who, doubtless, pumps out of him all the particulars he can get with regard to Mary. Is it possible that Lawson has engaged a detective to investigate this affair? It is not at all probable, for he is madly in love with Mary. But might not this very passion be the cause? For, failing by supplication to induce Mary to accept his terms, he may hope to compel her submission to a still lower price by holding a threat over her head. Is that a feasible supposition? Mary herself conceived that he had struck out a new line of attack. If he knows so much already, is it necessary to engage the services

of a detective? To strike, surely he must necessarily prove beyond doubt the truth of his suspicions, and be prepared to back his threats with damning evidence. With regard to these handcuffs, why should Edwards employ such a very hazardous means of examining them? It cost him nothing to make the attempt, which was at least worth the trial, and it may have been the only means at his command. Hum! there is Morton; if he will accept bribes for one thing, he might for another. Lawson might have got what information he wanted through him. Perhaps he dare not go so far as that for fear of discovery. He may think it safer to put the business in the hands of a private inquiry agent; for supposing his perquisitions are discovered, it will only tend to intimidate Mary and prepare her for capitulation. Is there anything in this particular pair of handcuffs which might lead to the identification of Mary? Turning them about, I found on one end of the right handcuff this mark:

D

456

Is it likely that a register is kept of all the handcuffs issued to the police-force? I can't say; but I'll find that out. Would it not be advisable at the same time to learn whether Edwards actually is the son-in-law of George the fly-driver? To be sure; the whole thing turns on the suggestion that the old man is a detective. I must know that at once.'

With this I jumped up, slipped the handcuffs in my pocket, joined Mary in the garden, and told her I was called out to an urgent case, and off I went forthwith, too impatient to wait for the pony to be put in.

As luck would have it, I reached Boro' Green Station about five minutes before the arrival of the down-train, and there in the line of vehicles standing outside I espied Mist's fly, with George laying a horsecloth over his nag.

'Afternoon, Dr. Harvey,' said he, touching his hat as I approached—just as I wished.

'Good afternoon, George. How's your father-in-law?'

'Well, sir,' he replied, with a smile, and a little astonishment, 'he was pretty middlin' like when last I heard from him.'

'I was told that he was bad with rheumatism.'

'Why, so he was, sir, along of carrying fish at Billingsgate, and getting the wet into his bones' (the very words Edwards used, thought I), 'which threw him out of collar, so to speak; but he's got a job at s'rimp bilin' now, and he's getting on pretty fair like.'

'Then he's not likely to be down here now-abouts.'

'No, sir. The missis did talk about havin' him down when he was so bad; but it wouldn't run to it, you know, sir—things bein' rather tight with us just now. Might I ask, sir, beggin' your pardon, how you came to know about him?'

'My informant was a patient—a thin, wiry, little old man.'

'With his eyes all over the shop, in a manner of speakin'? Well, he's a rum un, ain't he, sir? Been staying a day or two at the George and Dragon. Never knew such an inquisitive old party—wanted to know all about everything. Got askin' about you, sir, even, and Miss Smith, how long she'd been here, and all manner, till I got a bit tired—so much of it—and up and told him he'd better mind his own business.'

This was as much as I wanted to know; indeed, in one regard it was more.

My next visit was to the police-station, where I found the inspector reading a newspaper. Everybody is pleased to see the doctor (when he's not needed, and his visits are not to be paid for), and Mr. Geddes put down his paper to attend to me with the cheerfullest face.

'Geddes,' said I, 'do you know a detective named Edwards?'

'Edwards—Edwards? No, Doctor; don't know anyone of that name.'

'If a detective of that name or any other were in the neighbourhood, I suppose you would be aware of it?'

'Bound to know it, sir, if he was in the force. If he was only one of those private inquiry fellows it would be another thing. There's no love lost between us and them, you know. If they can spoil our game, they will, and—well, we're not likely to help them, so they take care to give us a wide berth.'

I was delighted to hear this, and feeling myself now on safe ground, I produced the pair of handcuffs, and, handing them to him, said:

'You know I'm rather fond of collecting curiosities. Will you tell me if there is anything peculiar about these?'

'Well, they're precious small to begin with,' said he, handling them; 'and then I should say they're about the first pair that was ever made, they're so old-fashioned.

There, that's the style of "bracelet" we use now,' he added, taking down a pair from the wall and offering them to me.

'These are not marked,' said I, examining them.

'They never are, sir.'

'But those I gave you are.'

'Why, so they are!' he exclaimed. 'Well, this is the first pair I've ever seen numbered. Precious old—I should say they had been kept just because of their size, for clapping on a boy or a woman. Though they're scarcely ever used for them—unless it's an awful desperate case.'

'Thank you, Geddes. That's all I want to know.'

'I suppose this detective you are speaking about sold you these?' he observed, with a broad grin. 'Made out they'd been worn by some regular notorious criminal, I dare say?'

I nodded acquiescence.

'Ah, that's a regular artful fake. Those fellows go about pretending they're detectives,

and get rid of a lot of worthless rubbish this way.'

He handed back Mary's handcuffs as he spoke, and I was about to return those he had given me, when an idea came into my head.

'I am thinking that I should like to convict that fellow of his fraud, if I meet him again,' said I. 'May I have these handcuffs for a few days?'

'Well, Doctor, I suppose it's against the regulations; but still, if you only want them for a short time I think I can oblige you.'

I promised he should have them back by Wednesday, and came home highly delighted with my successful inquiry, and not less pleased with myself.

I have laid the unmarked handcuffs that the Inspector lent me on the shelf of the cabinet where the others lay, and on the top of them set a small piece of paper—imperceptible, even at a short distance. Now when Mr. Edwards comes on Tuesday I will give

him a good opportunity of examining the 'bracelets,' and they will certainly throw him off the scent if his only clue is the fact that the handcuffs put upon Mary at Wayford were marked. If the paper is not where I have placed it after the visit of Edwards I shall know that my suspicions were well founded, and that I have beaten him at his own game.

Of course I have not said a word upon this matter to Mary, and have done my best to conceal the fears I have on her behalf.

Mr. Edwards has shortened my suspense by a couple of days. I had just finished my doze this afternoon when Morton came to tell me that 'the poor man who came yesterday about his rheumatics' wished to see me.

'Show him in,' said I, glancing at the cabinet.

The door was partly open, the key in the lock, just as he left it yesterday. I pulled up the blind to the top that he might have plenty

of light for his examination, and just as I had done this the old man hobbled in, groaning as before.

'I dootifully ask your pardon, sir,' he began, 'for callin' again so soon, and to-day, Sunday and all, but, seein' how kind and benevolent you are——'

'Come, my good fellow, never mind that! What's the matter?'

'A haccident, sir—a shockin' haccident, sir,' he groaned, seating himself, with a furtive glance at the cabinet. 'Broke the bottle, sir—lost every drop of that precious liniment, and just as it was beginning to work on me and all. If it hadn't been Sunday, sir, I should ha' cussed myself for bein' that clumsy, but——'

'Never mind,' said I, rising and cutting him short. 'You shall have some more.'

'I've brought a bottle, sir, thankin' you kindly,' said he, drawing a small beer-bottle from his pocket, 'and if you wouldn't mind puttin' it in this, as I can hold by the neck—

them medicine-bottles is that slippy and awk'ard for a party whose fingers is all thumbs, in a manner of speaking, along of this rheumatics.'

'Very good: I will fill the bottle for you,' said I, only too glad to accept the expedient he had devised for gaining more time.

I gave him full five minutes, and when I returned the discomfiture in his face rewarded me. He thanked me with very few words, seeming to think it was scarcely worth while to keep up a pretence, and in bidding me good afternoon there was a cynical grin on his face, as though he were saying to himself: 'I've a good mind to tell the old fool to keep his precious embrocation.'

The moment the street-door closed I hastened to the cabinet and looked in. The paper was displaced—he had not even taken the pains to lay the handcuffs in the position that he found them.

'That's one to me!' said I, with a chuckle.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NOVEMBER TWENTY-SEVENTH.

My mind has been too much disturbed, my feelings too agitated by the incidents of the past week, to pay attention to small matters like this of writing up my journal. Moreover, I have been somewhat discouraged by the unpleasant evidence of my vanity in the last notes I made.

I certainly flattered myself then that I had outwitted the inquiry agent, and got rid of him for good and all. But I was very soon to discover that this was not the case. For, being up a little after daybreak on Monday, and peeping out of the window to see whether it was the sort of morning for finishing my bulbs before breakfast, or for turning into bed

again, I caught sight of a couple of faces peering over the wicket-gate in Mill Lane, and one of them I recognised immediately. It was that rascal Edwards. The other face was unknown to me, but it was shrewd enough to excite my alarm.

'Ha, ha!' thought I, 'you're not discouraged, Mr. Edwards, that's evident; but you have found it necessary to get another vagabond to help you. Well, I shall know his face when I see it again—that's something!'

Still peering over the gate, Edwards, who was the more active of the two, cast a quick eye this way and that, down the kitchen-garden and the lawn, and then ran it over the house. Happily, I had not drawn the blind up, but merely availed myself of the opening at the side, so there was nothing to upset a natural conclusion that the whole household was still sound asleep. Satisfied on this point, he slipped his hand over the gate, and tried the fastening. It was locked—

which I regretted, for I would have liked to know what his intentions were had it been open. Then the two sauntered off down the lane towards the stable-yard, to try the gate there, I dare say. Presently they came back, and again peered over the wicket. It struck me that they were on the look-out for Morton, who would naturally be the first to come from the house. After taking a complete survey of the whole place, Edwards whispering to his companion and nodding once or twice towards the thick clump of evergreens that screened the tool-house, they descended from the gate-steps, and stood under the hedge, in consultation, I supposed, from the movements of their hats, which just rose above the hedge in my line of vision. Then they separated, Edwards going up the lane at a fairly brisk pace, his companion strolling slowly down towards the stable once more.

I slipped my clothes on without further delay, in order that I might be down before this fellow could get a chance of speaking

to Morton, questioning myself the while as to the purport of their proceedings. Had Edwards' quick and experienced eye detected the change I had rung upon the handcuffs? If so, his suspicion with regard to Mary would be confirmed. Or, finding them only an ordinary pair, had he come to the conclusion that the information given him, possibly by the police, was misleading, and that the handcuffs worn by Mary were not distinguished by any particular mark? This conjecture seemed to me the more plausible. But who was the other fellow—another detective, or—and this suggestion took my breath away—a witness brought to identify Mary? If both were simply agents employed by Lawson to terrorize Mary, they clearly would not come at a time when it was least likely she could see them. No; this early examination of the ground pointed rather to secret operations. The attempt to open the gate indicated an intention to find a place of concealment, and Edwards' repeated nod

towards the shrubbery supported that idea. What witness could he induce to act in this fraudulent manner? Could it be one of the constables who had her in their charge at the time of the accident? I could not say—I had given but little attention to them at the time, and a uniform makes so much difference to the look of a man—but from what Geddes had told me with regard to the jealousy existing between the 'force' and the private detectives, I considered it very unlikely that a constable would be permitted to give his services in a private investigation of this kind. 'Well, whoever he be,' said I, slipping on my coat, 'I'll know his business before long!'

Taking my hat and stick, and the bunch of keys I invariably carried with me when called out at night, I left the house by the front, closed the door softly behind me, and then, going out into the road, cast my eye to the right and left. Edwards was nowhere in sight. At a brisk pace, as if I were returning from a visit, I turned down Mill Lane, and

then I caught sight of my man sitting on the gate just opposite the stable entrance smoking a reflective pipe. Seeing me, he slipped the pipe in his pocket, and as I approached got down from his perch and touched his hat respectfully. He was a decent-looking young fellow, with a shaven face, sharp keen features, and a complexion reddened by exposure to the weather; his tight-fitting cords, a flashy horse-shoe pin, and a collar that kept his throat rigid, gave him the appearance of a stable hand.

'You're up early, my man,' said I, stopping at the stable-gate and taking out my keys.

'It ain't for the likes of me, sir, to be layin' abed late,' he replied in a doleful tone, to which he added an explanatory cough, pressing his knuckle into his side.

'Why, how's that?' I asked.

'Out o' work, sir.' (Another cough.) 'In Maidstone Hospital three weeks with influenzy. Bit better now, sir, but clean stony broke'—(more cough)—'which is hard, bein'

out of employ, and me with this cough and all.'

He overdid that cough—indeed, he was a very indifferent artist in comparison with old Edwards.

'''Scuse me, sir,' he added, 'but might I ask if you are Dr. Harvey ?'

'I am.'

'Because I heard last night that you are very good to poor fellows on the road, and though I ain't a regular tramp, I am praoud to say, I kim round here in the hopes as you might give me half a day's work for to 'nable me to get on to Gravesend this evening, sir.'

'I dare say we can manage that,' said I, opening the gate. 'What's your name ?'

'Roberts, sir—William Roberts.'

'Well, what can you do, Roberts ?' I asked, shutting the gate, and then leading the way through the kitchen-garden.

'Any odd jobs about the house, sir, like cleaning windows, brushing boots, clippin' a

horse, or barrer work ; but I should prefer anythin' indoors, as being less exposed.'

Of course another fit of barking followed this intimation.

'How long have you had that cough ?' I asked.

He had to consider a moment before replying, and then he said he had been troubled with it off and on for about six weeks.

'It's not an ordinary cough, Roberts ; I shall have to give you something to ease it.'

He replied that he didn't mind taking some stuff, but with evident dissatisfaction at 'stuff' being thrown into the bargain.

'Now, Roberts,' said I, shutting the door and facing him when we were in the workshop, 'how much do you want ? No, don't leave it to me ; tell me what you think is fair pay for a good morning's work.'

'Do you think half a crown would be unreasonable, sir ?'

'Not at all.'

I put my hand in my pocket, and laying two pieces on the bench, I said:

'There are two half-crowns, and you shall have them both if you will only have the honesty to tell me why you are so particularly anxious to do half a day's hard work here. Don't tell me a falsehood, Roberts, or instead of giving you five shillings I shall send for a policeman and give you into custody, for I know perfectly well that you are employed to get into my house for some dishonest purpose by an old rascal who calls himself Edwards, and a dozen other names, I'll be bound.'

The man looked at me in dismay, and made no reply.

'Come,' said I, 'there are the two half-crowns, and you shall have a breakfast-cup full of rhubarb and magnesia in addition if you want it.'

A wan smile played over his face as he raised his eyebrows, and scratched the scruff of his neck.

'On the other hand, there's my friend, Mr.

Geddes, the police inspector, who will be most happy to commit you for attempting to enter my house with felonious intent.'

'Hold hard there, sir. I defy anyone to say I'm a dishonest man.'

'Why, what is it but dishonesty to obtain money under false pretences? Did I not see you only half an hour ago try the fastening of my gate?'

'Not me, sir. It was him. And when he pointed out that I could get over the brick wall by the stable I refused to do it.'

'Why did he want you to get over the brick wall?'

'To hide in the shrubbery.'

'What for?'

'To identify a party.'

'What party?'

He made no reply to this; but stood scratching his scruff, making a wry face.

'Come, answer me,' I continued; 'there's my man coming down the garden. I will send for a constable if you don't speak out,

and you will find a magistrate less ready to accept your explanation than I.'

'Well,' said he, 'as the game's blowed I don't see why I shouldn't make a affey davey of it;' and then, proceeding as if he was in the witness-box, he added: 'My name's William Roberts, cab-driver, number 4,890, and I live at 6, Mill's Terrace, Bethnal Green Road. Friday night this old party kim to me saying his name was Matthews, private inquiry agent, Stamford Street, Blackfriars. He asked me if I could recognise a female as I took down to Epsom last Derby day if I see her again. I said, "Yes, I could." He said, "I'll give you two pound for the job and pay your exes." I says, "All right, I'm agreeable." He says, "I'll send you a wire when you're to meet me;" and with that we parted friendly like over a quart of four-half—no, I don't like to deceive—it was mild and bitter. Accordingly I received a telegraph on Saturday, as it might be the day before yesterday, saying, "Meet me at Boro' Green Station to-morrow

afternoon," which was yesterday. I kim down and met Matthews, who brought me here this morning, saying it was in your house as the female lived. He ast me to hide in the grounds as you was wide awake and suspicious, and on my objecting to this he perposed that I should put on a cough and get a job in the house, as you was a soft file who took in anybody, and so get a sight of this female. After which I was to meet him at the George and Dragon at Ightham. There you are, sir, that's the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. May I die if it ain't, and I can't say no fairer than that.'

'Who is employing Matthews to make this inquiry ?'

'I ain't aware, sir.'

'You must have seen him talking to someone last night ?'

'He talks to everyone, sir—never see such an old party for talking.'

I took up the half-crowns slowly from the

bench and chinked them in my hand as I reflected on what I had heard.

'Are you certain that you should know the—the woman you refer to again?'

'Positive sure. She's got a face you don't see every day, and ain't likely to mix up with any others. Then she was fixed in my recollections by the 'strorinary circumstances in which we picked her up.'

'How do you mean, picked her up?' I asked, regarding him with surprise.

'Why, sir, I was driving the Hono'ble Mr. Clarence Spottiswoode down to the races, and my off trace broke. He got out while I was a-mendin' of it, and comes back with this here female. Looked suspicious like, her a-comin' out of a private road just past Tootin', and I couldn't get my eyes off her on the course, her being that good-lookin' and mysterious.'

I did not care to question him further with respect to Mary, but I asked him how Matthews had discovered him.

'That was easy enough for a man like him

—my name and number bein' reported in the *Police News* as a witness in the inquiry respectin' the murder of the Hono'ble Mr. Spottiswoode.'

There was not the slightest doubt that this man could identify Mary. How was I to prevent him? While I was pondering this question he said, in a tentative manner:

'Of course, I don't want to do anything unhandsome, for handsome is as handsome does, and I wouldn't make it unpleasant for the female if—if you could make it worth my while to chuck old Matthews.'

I was terribly perplexed. For a few pounds I might buy the secrecy of this man. I could certainly send him off by the next train to London. But would that secure secrecy? How long would it take Matthews to find him, and elicit the fact that he had received a bribe from me? Would not that bribe itself be a tacit admission of Mary's guilt, and was there any room to believe that this man would not return to identify her if the enemy

made it 'worth his while'? No; clearly, that would not do. I should injure rather than help Mary by accepting this offer.

'There is the money I promised you,' said I, dropping the half-crowns into the cabman's hand. 'You may "chuck" Matthews or not, as your sense of honesty and decency directs, but if I catch either of you hanging about my house again I will punish you for dishonest practices as sure as my name's Harvey.'

Opening the door, I glanced up towards the house, which, from the landing, is screened by the low-growing arbutus shrubs, and there, to my unspeakable terror, I perceived Mary coming from the house. Roberts was close behind me; but not yet upon the landing. Should I go back and wait, or go down with the hope of getting him out by the stable yard before Mary came? Reason bade me take the latter course, as Mary would, undoubtedly, come to seek me. I hastened down, bidding him follow me in a low, hurried tone, and I felt relieved, as I glanced

back, to find that his attention was fixed upon the awkward steps he was descending. I quickened my pace, and got him out into Mill Lane without accident; then I returned quickly up the garden to meet Mary.

She had lingered to pluck some withered dahlias, and we met in the middle of the lawn.

'Why, my dear,' said I, 'who expected to see you down so early?'

''Tis past seven,' said she; 'and did you not say last night that you should finish setting the bulbs before——'

The last word died upon her lips; the colour left her cheek, and her regard was fixed as if by fascination upon something across the lawn.

Turning my head that way, I saw the cabman's face above the wicket. He nodded to us with an impudent grin and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NOVEMBER TWENTY-SEVENTH—*continued.*

After the man had disappeared Mary's eyes remained fixed upon the gate as though she expected that grinning face to reappear ; then, turning to me, we regarded each other in mute dismay. For myself, I knew not what to say —whether to feign ignorance or to confess all.

'Do you know that man ?' she asked at length, in a voice scarcely raised above a whisper.

Was there any advantage to be gained by deceiving her ? No ; for her own safety it was better that she should be aware of the sword that hung over her.

'Yes, my dear girl,' said I ; 'we have only just parted.'

'Is he the—the cabman ?'

'Yes ; I hoped to prevent his seeing you, but the chance was against us.'

'He must have seen me sooner or later. If he has come to identify me it is not likely that he would go away unsatisfied—believing I am here. I could not have stayed shut up in my room for ever. Oh, not for a week ! I must have gone out to face him, and put an end to my suspense ; it would have been unbearable even for a day. It's less terrible to meet an enemy than to hide from him.'

'To be sure it is, my dear, if one only has the courage to do it.'

'There are times when one must find courage,' she responded with a little gesture of despair. 'What does he want—money ?'

'Yes ; and I refused to give him what he wanted. It would have seemed like a confession of guilt.'

She nodded assent.

'If he had not betrayed me he would have

kept me constantly under his thumb; and, indeed, that would be worse.'

She turned her eyes abruptly to the gate again, and asked:

'Are they over there, do you think—the police?'

'It's not at all likely, and I'll tell you why——' I began.

'I must know first; you shall tell me why after.'

She walked quickly to the gate with a firm step, opened it, and went down into the lane, I following hastily and with dreadful trepidation. There was no one there. We went to the top of the lane and looked to the right and left. Roberts was not in sight.

'Now I can listen to you,' said Mary, taking my arm as we entered by the front gate. 'Tell me all you know. Do not hide anything from me.'

I told her without reserve the events I have recorded here, and explained to her my reasons for believing that the police were not

yet concerned in the inquiry which I thought had been set afloat by Lawson to coerce her into submission to his will.

'If it were only that,' she said eagerly, 'and it seems as if it might be. But we must not deceive ourselves by hoping too much. Let us suppose that it is the independent action of the police who have traced me here by some means unknown to us; what would happen next?'

'Well, my dear,' I stammered, with a 'hem' and a 'ha' between every other word; 'I suppose—upon the evidence of—of that fellow—the cabman, you know—they would proceed to—to get a warrant—warrant—a warrant for——'

'For my apprehension?' and at my rueful nod she continued: 'Where would they get that warrant?'

'I can't say for certain, but I think they would obtain it from the nearest justice of the peace.'

'When?'

'As soon as possible.'

'Could they get it in an hour, do you think ?'

'Probably.'

'Then by nine o'clock, if I am to be arrested, the police will be here ?'

Except that the colour had not returned to her cheek, there was not the slightest sign of fear in her face or manner. She was quite collected and calm ; it was I who trembled. The perspiration came out upon my forehead as I contemplated the possibility of her arrest.

'There may be difficulties that I cannot foresee,' I said hopefully, 'that will give us time to look about us and see what may be done. One thing I can and will do if—if nothing happens by nine o'clock. I'll take those confounded handcuffs over to Boro' Green, and see Geddes, who must know by this time whether the police are in requisition.'

'Yes, yes ; that will put an end to our doubts. And I will go with you. Now we will see if breakfast is ready.'

'But, Mary,' said I, detaining her, 'if the warrant is issued it would be madness to go over there — nothing more nor less than courting a catastrophe.'

'If I were a poor little mouse,' said she, turning upon me with a smile—nothing seeming to dull her natural sense of humour—'I would rather jump into the cat's mouth than wait for death in a trap.'

We were suffered to eat our breakfast in peace, I making a poor pretence of eating, and but a sorry comforter to my dear Mary, my ear straining to catch only the sounds I dreaded, and every movement in the house causing my heart to sink with the belief that the police had come for her. When at last the clock struck nine, I took the dear girl in my arms and kissed her as if the fatal point were past—though but an hour before I had tried to solace her with the suggestion that the arrest might very likely be deferred. But so it is that our expectations are ever governed by hope or fear.

At half-past nine the chaise came to the door, and Mary, despite a second remonstrance on my part, took a seat in it. As we approached the railway, I asked her if she would not like to wait in the station while I went round the corner to Boro' Green, but she declined emphatically to take any middle course, and so, with my heart in my mouth, I drove into the Maidstone road, and pulled up right in front of the police-station.

I found the Inspector in his shirt sleeves, at his desk by the window. His first words were reassuring :

'How do, Doctor ? Taking your young lady out for a drive this brisk morning ?'

'Yes,' said I ; 'and I've just dropped in to return these,' laying the handcuffs on his desk. 'I haven't seen that fellow since.'

'And not likely to,' he laughed. 'I think I know your man. He has been staying down at the George and Dragon the last two or three days, and has got another queer customer along with him now. I don't like

the looks of them. They are up to no good here, sir, I'll be bound. I tried my best to find out his game, and sent one of my plain-clothes men—a sharp chap he is too—to pump him. Can't get at it. I see 'em both going past towards Ightham about eight, thick as thieves, the pair. Wouldn't ha' seen me if I hadn't given 'em a word. "Got any darbies to sell?" says I. "Darbies," says the old man, looking as innocent as a babe, "I don't know what you mean." "Oh, well, take care I don't have to enlighten you," says I with a wink ; and they went on looking most uncomfortable. But I advise you, sir, to keep an eye on your plate.'

When I recounted this to Mary she was less elated than I.

'I should think he would be a very poor detective who would take Mr. Geddes into his confidence,' she remarked. 'And this only proves that Matthews is not a fool—so much the worse for me. It is not likely that the Inspector would know by sight all the detec-

tives in the police force, and it may very well be that Matthews mistrusts this witness and is waiting for others—there must be half a dozen who can identify me—to make assurance doubly sure.'

'My dear girl,' said I, pulling up—we were upon the railway bridge—'do you take my purse and get away to a place of safety while you can. By this evening you may be on the other side of the Channel. Pray do, my little friend—if not for your own sake, for mine.'

This simple offer that I made in all love seemed to touch her heart, for she could not answer me at once ; when she turned to me her eyes were dimmed with tears.

'You kind friend,' she murmured, 'I would do many things for your sake, but not that. See, we have gone so far that it would be something worse than cowardice to turn back at the sight of danger, leaving our object wholly unaccomplished. What we have done must count for nothing but time wasted, for

nothing is done. Where is Mr. St. John? Where are Olive and Mrs. Lawson? Shall we leave them and abandon their cause at the very moment when something may be achieved?'

'In what way, Mary?'

'If this is only a ruse on Mr. Lawson's part —as we may now really hope it is—we may find means of turning it to our advantage.'

That prospect seemed so vague and indefinite that I thought it best not to examine it too closely, for fear of adding to Mary's trouble, and so I only observed, 'Well, dear, I will be overruled in this'—I woke Bess up, and we jogged on—'if you positively think that this is no more than a device of Lawson's.'

'We shall know soon. If he has that man's evidence, it will not be long before he breaks the silence with a threat.'

'Then I wish nothing better than to see a letter from him when we get home!' I cried.

'I think he will come to see me,' said she, in her assured, quiet tone.

'To-day, my dear?'

'Yes; unless he considers that a day or two of suspense and anxiety will weaken us and make us more willing to surrender.'

'And what part am I to play, my dear, if that rascal comes to our home?'

'Your own,' she replied without hesitation, smiling a little but kindly, and maybe thinking that it was impossible for me to play any other effectively. 'Do just as your heart prompts you.'

I was well satisfied to have no more onerous duty than this to perform. We went on in silence a little way; then, another idea striking me, I said:

'What say you, Mary, to our going up to town for the day? We may surely find something there to distract our thoughts, whilst here, at the best, time must lie heavily. In this way suspense may be less trying for us both. What do you think, dear?'

But she would not have it so.

'If this is to be my last day of liberty,' said she gravely, 'I would spend it at home, dear friend,' laying her hand tenderly on my arm. 'One last happy day in the old garden—it cannot be tedious—only too short, if the memory of it is to last me for ever.'

So when we reached home, she put on her big apron and helped me plant the bulbs almost as if that great calamity were not impending; only her manner was more than usually sweet and gentle, and once she referred to the dreadful future.

'When will these come up?' she asked, as she was planting some narcissus.

'Why, as soon as Christmas is turned the first green tips will begin to thrust themselves up through the brown earth.'

'If I am not here I shall think of that. And when will they bloom?'

'About February.'

'One might seem to see them grow day by day. Let them stay here,' said she, putting

the pot in the corner near my potting-bench. 'I should like to picture them there, and fancy that while I am thinking of them and you, you are looking at them and thinking of me.'

'As long as I live they shall stay there, my poor child,' said I, through my emotion.

It was the only allusion she made to the subject; all the rest of the day she was quite herself, bright and cheerful—in the afternoon following the usual routine of household duties with scrupulous exactness—and after dinner she would have me take my 'cello to accompany her. And so she gave me no scope for mournful musings till she bade me good-night, and left me. Then, indeed, my spirits sank to the lowest depth of desolation.

We had scarcely risen from breakfast Tuesday morning when the sound of carriage wheels drawing up sharply before the door reached our ears.

'That is he—go to him,' said Mary. 'You will find me in my room.'

I went to the door as a quick, sharp knock at the door was followed by a ring of the bell. Mr. Lawson was on the threshold, his sallow face drawn into an expression of the utmost alarm.

'Dr. Harvey,' he panted—he also was but a poor actor, for there was no occasion to gasp as if he had been running behind his carriage all the way from the Court—'Dr. Harvey—there is no time—to regard formalities. The welfare of a friend—dear to both of us—must make us forget past offences—and join hands in the mutual wish to save her. I have come to rescue Miss Smith. Let me see her at once, for the sake of Heaven!'

'If Mary's welfare is concerned, I can raise no objection to you seeing her,' said I, leading the way across the hall. 'She is in her room here, I believe.'

He met her with feverish delight shining through the mask of terror.

'Dear Miss Smith,' he exclaimed, seizing her hand as a miser might clutch at his

treasure ; then, perceiving that I had followed him into the room, he turned to me, still holding her hand, and said: 'What I have to say cannot be said before you, Dr. Harvey.'

'What cannot be said before me, sir, I take it, is not fit for Mary to hear ; and so, this being my house, I shall take the liberty of doing what I please in it.'

He looked at Mary for a suggestion, and she, withdrawing her hand, shrugged her shoulders, as if to intimate that they must yield to *force majeure.*

'I will spare your feelings, if I may, my dear Miss Smith,' he said, after flashing a venomous look upon me from his evil, reptile eyes. 'Tell me in one word if you have any reason to fear the consequences of an accident —a terrible mischance in which you were concerned last May?'

Clasping her hands, Mary sank into a chair with a supplicating glance at me.

'Yes,' said I, speaking for her, 'Mary does fear those consequences.'

'I will not question your innocence—we know that you are guiltless of that crime—but at the same time the balance of evidence against you is so great that there is the gravest cause to fear you may be made the victim of a judicial miscarriage.'

'In that case, sir, come to the point without further loss of time,' said I, getting another vicious look for my pains as he continued:

'I have just seen Sir Sidney Featherstone. An application has been made to him for a warrant to arrest you on a charge of murder. Knowing that I have a great regard for you—having met you the day we were in London—he declined to issue the warrant, upon the ground that the evidence offered by a cabman who identified you yesterday morning is insufficient. The detective who conducts this pursuit promises to procure other witnesses, and has telegraphed for the officers who took you in custody. These men may arrive at any moment, and if they identify you you are lost.'

Mary covered her face with her hands, a moan of despair escaping her.

'To avoid this awful calamity,' pursued Lawson, 'I have come here to save you. My carriage is at the door. In a few hours I can place you beyond the reach of these blood-hounds. I implore you to accept this means of escape.'

'Oh, what shall I do?' moaned Mary.

'Sir,' said I, 'if Mary leaves this house it shall be under my escort—not yours. It is for you, my dear, to decide now whether you will go or not. I am prepared to take you away this moment; and in my hands you know that you are safe. Speak, my child—will you go?'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NOVEMBER TWENTY-SEVENTH TO TWENTY-EIGHTH.

Mary sprang to her feet with distraction in her look, turning first to me and then to Lawson, as if unable to decide what course to take. He, who had heard my ultimatum with evident consternation, seized the opportunity to get a new footing on the ground that seemed to be slipping under his feet.

'Wait,' he said quickly; 'a hasty movement may ruin all. You may be certain that this house is watched, and that in every step you take from it you will be followed. An attempt to escape will as surely lead to your apprehension.'

'Then why did you propose it?' I asked sharply.

'Because I have the means to throw the pursuers off the scent,' he replied fiercely. 'If you must meddle in this affair, you will at least have sufficient sense to accept such help from me as I alone can give. For this day, at least, Miss Smith is safe.'

I did not fail to see the discrepancy between this statement and a former one, but I made no attempt to interrupt him.

'Sir Sidney has gone to London, and will not return until to-morrow. Another magistrate will not issue a warrant refused by him, and I shall make it my business to visit them this morning—if Dr. Harvey will listen to reason,' he interpolated, with another vindictive glance at me—'and let them know of Sir Sidney's objection. Wait, then, till to-morrow, by which time I will have found such means of delaying the police as must ensure your safe escape. Will you accept this offer?'

'Surely it is for the best,' said Mary, appealing to me.

'As you please, my dear,' said I stiffly.

'I will take that for granted,' cried Lawson quickly. 'Now I will provide the means for your flight.'

With that he left us hurriedly, as if fearing a refusal of his offer. And as the door closed on him Mary smiled at me with a long-drawn sigh of relief.

Nothing further happened during the day; but a little after ten, when Mary had gone upstairs, an itching desire to know if the police were watching the house led me to stroll out into the road. Turning the corner of Mill Lane I nearly knocked against a man standing in the shadow. In the first instant I thought it must be a constable, but in the next I perceived, to my still greater astonishment, that it was St. John.

'Good heavens, Hal, you here!' I exclaimed. 'Come in, for God's sake.'

He complied in silence, and I led him into the house.

I was glad to see him, heartily glad. I don't know why, for assuredly there was nothing in his appearance to rejoice at, and it was in defiance of principle and reason to be pleased at his hanging about the place like a love-sick boy, and waiting till Mary's light was out to enter the house by stealth, as if he had done some wrong thing. His dress was even more slovenly and soiled than when I saw him last; his short curls were matted, and there was a dark red line across his forehead when he took off his hat as if by long wearing it had eaten into his throbbing brow. The facial lines stood out prominently from his sunken cheeks. There was a gleam of hope in his eyes as he met my regard, but it was the feverish hope that comes and goes by fits and starts—flickering up like a dying flame to fade away in gloom, not the healthy hope that is steadfast, and joyous, and fearless.

'Here again,' said he, with a short, reckless

laugh as he looked round the room on entering ; then throwing himself in a chair before the fire, he filled his pipe in silence, hanging his head with self-contempt upon his downcast face.

I gave him a good stiff tumbler of whisky and a light for his pipe, scarcely less silent than he, for in truth I did not know what to say. When he had drunk deeply and taken two or three vigorous pulls at his pipe he said, rubbing his hands nervously :

'I have seen nothing of Olive. Have you?'

'No ; but she has returned to the Court.'

'Ah!' he exclaimed eagerly. 'That is why Mary went there that afternoon. I thought so. I said to myself that was the reason.'

'Yes ; that was the chief motive, I believe.'

He nodded with delight in his face, rubbing his hands more strenuously ; his pipe quivered in his teeth. I regarded these signs of excitement with uneasiness. And yet his presence

here indicated a change in his condition which encouraged the hope of better things.

'She didn't mean all that she said the other morning, did she?—No,' he pursued, disregarding my shrug and raised eyebrows—'her pride revolted against my brutal hectoring—that was it. That was it. At such a time we employ words to conceal our thoughts; she merely answered a fool according to his folly. She could not have meant what she said, speaking in anger. Worldly self-seeking is directly opposite to her real feelings, as we know them—eh? You remember what she said about happiness the night I asked her to be my wife? She was her own dear self then; and what she said afterwards was a complete contradiction of her previous professions. That proves what I maintain—she was in anger, and did not say what she meant.'

'The contradiction proves that on one occasion she was not speaking truthfully,' said I.

'No; but she spoke truthfully when she

was not incensed by my brutality. I will believe the best of her, not the worst.'

He looked long and thoughtfully into the fire, and thinking it best to turn the subject, I asked him where he had been since he left us.

'I don't know,' he answered carelessly. 'Wandering about—coming to my senses slowly. But I am coming back to them,' he added, turning to me with some of his old vigour and force.

'Why, that's right, my dear fellow,' said I with delight. 'Now let us talk about Olive.'

'No; I can think only of Mary just now. Give me time, Doctor.'

Should I tell him of Mary's peril now? For many reasons it seemed inadvisable. At any rate, I might take time for reflection, if I could persuade him to stay; and so I tried again to open a conversation on general topics, but all to no purpose. He seemed to listen as he smoked, looking into the fire; but his thoughts I found were still fixed upon Mary,

and he spoke not a word until I shifted my chair, and said :

'Well, Hal, I dare say you will be glad to turn in ; it's getting late.'

'Yes,' said he, rising briskly and finishing his whisky ; 'I shall sleep to-night.'

'You will find your room prepared. Ann will have seen to that.'

'I've taken a bed at Boro' Green. I won't stay, thank you, Doctor. I don't want to make poor Mary uncomfortable. But I shall come here to-morrow and see her.'

'You need a change of linen.'

'That's all right. I went to London this morning and brought away what is necessary. Good-night.' He stopped at the door, irresolute, with his fingers on the handle ; then summoning up courage to betray the feeling in his mind, he said in a low, appealing voice : 'Do you think she will forgive me ?'

'It isn't in her nature to cherish uncharitable feelings,' said I.

'No, no. That, too, I said to myself to-

night. I could tell by her playing that she was sorry for me. Yes, she'll forgive me,' he said, with that fearful hope flashing again in his eyes. Then he went away.

I thought it advisable, after breakfast this morning, to tell Mary of St. John's visit last night, that she might not be unprepared to meet him if he came as I expected.

'I heard his voice,' she said ; then, after walking along the path for a little while in pensive silence, she added, raising her eyes with a pained smile to me : 'Well, we must do the best we can.'

'We, my dear !' I exclaimed deprecatingly.

'Yes,' she replied gravely. 'You must stand by me, for I shall need your support.'

We were returning to the house when St. John came from it. At the first glance I almost doubted if it was he—his appearance was so altered. He had on a new tweed suit and a new hat ; his boots were lustrous, and his beard was freshly trimmed. He un-

doubtedly looked the better for these alterations, and indeed as handsome a man as any in England. Yet somehow I felt that I should have liked him more in his old clothes, stained as they were by exposure and wear. His character seemed to have lost its rugged force by this amelioration, which indicated a certain degree of self-abasement. We met under the veranda.

'Mary,' he said, holding forth his hand with supplication in his voice and in the expression of face and gesture.

She gave her hand, and answered his appeal with affectionate commiseration in her soft eyes—her heart, maybe, refusing at that moment to take dictation from her will.

'I must speak to you,' he said, 'a few words.'

She assented by an inclination of her head, but with a glance at me as if to ask for help. And so, when he led her through the open window into her room, I followed.

'You have forgiven me, Mary; I know that, little as I deserve forgiveness,' he began.

'Oh, pray don't speak of that,' she said. ''Tis so unlike yourself to ask pardon or to need it—to do anything which one could wish to forget. And there are other things of greater importance to think of. Olive——'

'Olive!' he exclaimed. 'What is she to me? I have no thought for anyone in the whole world but you. There is nothing to talk of till this one question that disposes of our lives—yours and mine—is answered. Listen to me, Mary. I came to you the other day mad with jealousy, and said such things as no woman with self-respect could pass without resentment. I stung your pride, and in your anger you professed a preference for the man I loathe to punish me. It was only that. You did not mean what you said. You cannot mean it. I read the truth now in your eyes. I should have known it then had I kept my reason.'

'If I spoke insincerely then, there has been time since for repentance,' said Mary. 'Yet, you know that I have visited the Court?'

'To make inquiries—to find Olive!'

'Yes; and to see Mr. Lawson. If you still doubt the truth of my professions, watch me to-morrow as you watched me a few days ago. I have arranged to leave this house—with your mother's husband.'

'I cannot believe this thing—I will not believe it, Mary!' he cried desperately.

'I offer you the proof—can I do more?'

He looked at her, silent with bewilderment, and then, in a tone of incredulity:

'You, Mary! You who love all that is good and beautiful in Nature—who shrink from what is hideous and vile! Of that, too, you have given me proof. What is there in that man that you can regard even with complacency—what is there not in him from which you should recoil? God knows I have sunk low enough in my own esteem; and yet, when I compare myself with that crawling reptile, I feel myself a hero!'

There was something majestic and heroic, too, in the look and attitude St. John all

unconsciously assumed with this assertion of conscious superiority. I think it struck Mary as well as me, but she kept her wits and replied quietly:

'You forget that he has wealth, and you have none.'

'If that is all your need, your want shall be satisfied. You shall have more wealth than ever he can offer you. Yes, though I have to stoop to lower means than his of getting it. Tell me the sum you need, and when it must be paid, and I swear to find it.'

I did not know what reply Mary could find to this, but after a moment's silence, fixing her eyes on St. John with an awful pity in them, she said deliberately:

'For a woman whose hand is to be bought, willing to sell herself indifferently to the hero or the reptile—a woman without heart or soul —you are prepared to stain your hands with crime? Ah, do not answer yet! Let me exercise the one small virtue of honesty, though I have none other. You shall know

all my faults before you barter away your own soul for such a worthless thing of flesh and blood. Tell him, Dr. Harvey, what you know of my past — of the time before he rescued me from the last resort of despair. Show him the handcuffs you took from my wrists —the means you gave me of escaping the police. At this very moment I might be taken and sentenced, if not to death, to life-long imprisonment for murder and robbery. For his sake,' she added, turning again to me, 'I ask you to be a witness to these facts.'

'She has revealed no more than the truth,' I said, sadly enough.

'But you have revealed more than you have intended!' he cried in exultation. 'I see now through the mystery that confounded me. You have pretended heartlessness to extinguish my love, because you felt you could not be my wife with this secret untold. For that reason you would have me believe in your preference for Lawson.'

'Am I fit to be the wife of an honest man?' she asked despairingly.

'Though every charge against you were proved to the hilt, you would yet be too good for such a man as he. What do I care for the past—for what you were in those days gone by? You, as I have found you—you, as you are now, I love. Be what you may in the eyes of the world by your past actions, you are still to me the dearest soul that lives.'

'Oh, let me be that!' she murmured, with emotion; 'but no more than that.'

'A barren love—no, no! Mary, you must be my wife.'

'A thief and murderess you would make your wife!'

'Thief—murderess—what you will!' he cried wildly. 'Here is my hand.'

She fixed her mournful eyes upon him, and was silent for some moments; then she said sorrowfully:

'You must think very ill of me, Mr. St. John. You must think I have lost all

honour and sense of shame and self-respect —that I have sunk to the very lowest stage of degradation—to accept your hand with such stains upon my character. You do me wrong. But,' she added, with dignity and rising pride, 'if I were blameless and free to marry whom I loved, I would be the wife of no man who held my honour so lightly.'

The crisis was past. I knew that neither subtle argument nor heartfelt prayer could now revoke Mary's decision; and so I quietly stepped out by the open window, as one leaves a sick-room not to witness the last throes of irremediable suffering.

Coming silently to the open door under the veranda, and glancing into the passage, I found, to my astonishment, Morton standing there with his ear to the door of Mary's room. Catching sight of me at the same moment, he bent down, affecting to pick something from the mat, and bustled off to hide his confusion. I cannot understand it. This is the second fault in his behaviour I have discovered in the

last week. Well, well, two faults in so many years!

I had no time to reflect on this incident then, for my surprise was scarcely past when St. John came to my side, and, laying his quivering hand on my arm, said, in a low tone:

'It's all over, Doctor; there's no hope now.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NOVEMBER TWENTY-EIGHTH.

'Well, my boy,' said I, taking St. John's arm as we crossed the lawn, 'what shall you do now?'

'What I should have done before—go away and leave poor Mary in peace. But if she is in danger!' he exclaimed, stopping short at the reflection.

'There is no danger that you can avert, Hal. No, my dear fellow, you can do nothing for her.'

'Except leave her. What an utterly selfish hound I have shown myself! To-morrow I'll go. I am too unmanned just now for any definite action. But you shall see me once more, Doctor, before I leave for good,

and you shall find that I am my own master again—with some remnant of decent stuff in me.'

With that he grasped my hand, and then strode away, going out into Mill Lane by the side gate. As I turned about to go back to Mary, Morton faced me, coming from the side-walk.

'I beg your pardon, sir; may I speak to you a word in private, sir?'

'Speak out, my man; we are alone here.'

'It's like this, if you please, sir. Bein' in the yard a-rubbin' down of the pony, about half a hour ago, Mr. Lawson gave me this letter, sir'—he produced a letter and a half-crown—'with this piece of silver, askin' me to deliver this note to Miss Smith unknown to you; but as I value a good master too 'ighly to do anything mean or underhanded, I wish to give up the same to you, sir; and I was a-lookin' for you, sir, when you discovered me at Miss Smith's door a-listenin' to distinguish if you was in there, sir—which bein' found

there in that position rather upset me, and I couldn't explain my object then, for fear of Miss Smith hearin' and takin' a dislike for me, which both Hann and me has always done our best to avoid.'

I think he would have run on with this interminable sentence for ten minutes had I not stopped him by taking the letter, bidding him keep the half-crown for his honesty, and sending him off. I wish to think the best I can of my man, but I somewhat fear that had I not discovered him listening at Mary's door, I should have heard nothing from him of the letter.

Going into the house, I found Mary arranging the music by the piano, with the evident purpose of diverting her thoughts from uselessly brooding over the happiness that was lost to her ; but her poor eyes showed how hard that trial was, even with the support of her courageous heart and dauntless purpose. She came into my arms with a little moaning cry, and there she wept for some minutes,

abandoning herself to the emotions under the unnerving influence of sympathy. But it was not for long; brushing away her tears impatiently, she exclaimed in a shaken voice:

'Oh, if I could end it all at once! If I had something to do that would take me out of myself. It seems so long. And yet it is not really. The end cannot be far distant. I should have told him about Olive—but I couldn't think of her then. Is he coming back?'

'Yes, he will come again. He promised me that. But he will go away to-morrow.'

'No, no. He must not go without Olive. We must get her away once more. He must know her peril. If I had told him, it might have aroused his sense of duty.'

'My dear, what could he do?' I asked deprecatingly.

'What could he do?' she echoed with returning spirit, and clenching her hands. 'What I would do if I were a man—what he will do when he is himself again.'

'Well, Mary, I feel sure that he will have recovered his self-command by the time he comes to wish us farewell. He will show us a manly face again, I warrant, if only for your sake, and that before nightfall. Meanwhile,' I added, feeling Lawson's letter as I dropped my hand into my pocket, 'it is advisable, perhaps, that you should know a fact which may affect your design ; I have strong reasons to suspect that Morton has been eavesdropping, and heard what passed between you and Hal.'

'Has he?' she exclaimed eagerly. 'We couldn't have wished anything better.'

I could not exactly see this, but I gave her Lawson's letter, telling her of Morton's excuse. She broke the envelope, quietly listening to me, and having glanced at the letter, exclaimed softly :

'The very thing.'

'Is there any new development that you can tell me about?' I asked, glancing inquiringly at the letter in her hand.

She smiled.

'Well, you shall see my answer,' she said, sitting down at the writing-table and taking up a pen.

In a few minutes she had dashed off a couple of pages, which she handed still wet to me.

'DEAREST MR. LAWSON,' she wrote,

'It is quite impossible that I should meet you this evening; indeed, I doubt if I shall ever see you again. Mr. St. John has returned more violent than ever in his protestations. I have done all I can to discourage him, even to confessing my past offences. But he will not take a refusal, although Dr. Harvey, I know, has done all in his power to dissuade him. He has insisted on my taking time for consideration, and will return again (this evening, I think) for an answer. I don't know what to do—my position is most embarrassing. Dr. Harvey has something more than a suspicion of our clandestine interviews, and objects most strongly to my correspond-

ing with you.' I grunted acquiescence at this point. 'What should I do if he discharged me for disobedience, like any other paid servant? Positively, in my own interests (and I am a little bit worldly, you know), I think I ought to accept Mr. St. John. And I am moved by something more than worldly conditions; I cannot help feeling for him, he is so earnest, so willing to forgive all my faults, and so submissive, that I think he would make a very industrious and obedient husband. You would really pity him if you could see how his handsome face is wasted with anxiety. At any rate, you must pity me; and if you never see me again, pray believe that I shall always think of you as a very dear friend.

'M.'

'Now,' said she, as I handed back her letter, 'may I send Morton with this?'

'Certainly.'

'Let me see—what excuse can I make?

Oh yes, I want some silk from Mr. Harrison's, at Ightham.' This pretext was invented by her quick imagination as she addressed the envelope. 'Wait,' she added, pausing in the act of folding her letter; 'you surprised Morton at the door before Mr. St. John had left me.'

'Yes.'

'Then he couldn't have heard the last word. Are my eyes very red?'

'You look as though you had been crying, my dear child.'

'I must add a postscript to explain that. Mr. Lawson will certainly cross-examine Morton closely.'

'I have had a dreadful scene with Dr. Harvey,' she wrote at the foot of the page, 'in consequence of your letter, which Morton foolishly gave up to him. Happily, he did not open it; but if he had, he could not be more violently incensed than he is. It is intolerable. I will not endure this another

day. You will know what has become of me if you see me no more.'

She enclosed the letter, slipped it in her pocket, then, taking a piece of embroidery from her work-basket, she asked me where she should find Morton. I told her that he was in the orchard-house.

'Then, now to make that poor man shake in his shoes,' said she, with a faint smile; but as she crossed the lawn with the work in her hand, every movement of her body was expressive of violent anger.

'What an actress she would have been!' I said to myself, as I looked after her; but I ought to have said, 'What an actress she is!' for even then I found it difficult to realize which was her natural and which her assumed character.

I was in the garden when Morton returned about an hour later. He came directly up to me, carrying a small parcel, with every appearance of honesty in his manner.

'Here is the silk, sir, as Miss Smith sent me for to purchase at Mr. Harrison's.'

'Take it indoors to Miss Smith,' I growled, disgusted with the fellow's double-dealing, for I knew well enough that he had been to the Court. But this surliness of mine chimed in very well with Mary's plans.

I was not in error; Mary showed me the corner of a letter with a gesture counselling silence as Morton left the room, after taking the covers from the lunch-table. For the sake of prudence I said nothing upon this subject then, but I could see that Mary was highly excited, and that her thought was absorbed in the stratagem she had in hand, and this fired my curiosity considerably, for I felt myself still groping in the dark.

As soon as he had finished his meal I set Morton to work on a long job in the orchard-house, and then, finding Mary in her room, I closed the door, seated myself, and said:

'Now, my dear, I want you to tell me all about it.'

'Ah!' said she, raising her eyebrows with a little smile, at my simplicity, I believe, in thinking that I was to get at her secret so easily.

'You have received an answer from Lawson to your letter?'

'Yes; a most satisfactory answer,' she replied. 'Just what I wanted.'

'Well, Mary, I should like to see that letter, if you please.'

She smiled again; then, shaking her head, she said:

'I am afraid I cannot show it just now; but you shall see it.'

'When?'

'To-night.'

'Mary,' said I, reproachfully, I think, 'have I no claim on your confidence?'

'All that affection can give,' she replied impulsively, coming to my side and putting her arm about my neck. 'But for the very reason that you love me so, I dare not tell you all that is in my mind—for the reason,

dear, that has made us hide our design from Mr. St. John. You would not help me do what I have got to do, because you love me more than I love myself. At the last moment you might overthrow all that I have been building up so carefully, and leave me nothing but the ruins of a castle in the air.'

'Certainly, I would do nothing to help you sacrifice your own happiness.'

'My own happiness! Why, this is the one great chance of securing it. When I think of those poor wretches who have to end their lives in prison, as I may have to end mine, I fancy that their misery would be lessened if they could say, "I did one good thing in my life, out in the world there. Someone is better for it—someone thinks kindly of me now and then."'

That well-remembered look of tragic resignation came back to her face as she saw herself perhaps a prisoner with nothing but this poor consolation to lighten the burden of

a hopeless life. I could find no hopeful word to say; but she, throwing off all gloomy forebodings, and rising by the mere buoyancy of her disposition above these overwhelming fears, said, turning to me with a smile:

'Why go half-way to meet troubles that may never come? I am free now, and may take advantage of my liberty.' And then she asked me, with a malicious twinkle in her pretty eyes, if there was anything else she could tell me.

'Why, my dear,' said I, 'you have told me nothing as yet. But for all that, I begin to see whither your scheme is leading you. Tell me only this—in one word, Mary: do you intend to meet Lawson again?'

'Yes,' she answered; 'this evening.'

'For Heaven's sake have some care for yourself!' I implored.

'I have always this'—she tapped her pocket—'my friend in need.'

'There's little to fear from the personal violence of such a wretch as Lawson; but the

subtler means that he employs—are you proof against them?'

'If I were not, it would be too late now to warn me. Oh, those subtler means! He has tried them often enough to know that they are useless.'

'You have some — some counterspell,' I said, scratching my ear and making a wry face—for even now I could not believe without compunction in a man of this age practising witchcraft.

'Yes,' said she, laughing at my grimace, 'the counterspell of perfect health. You do not think I am a hysterical subject, do you, Doctor?'

'No, my dear, thank Heaven. But what has that to do with it?'

'Everything,' said she, opening her desk, and taking out a book that I recognised at once. 'You must read this to know how completely a man may control the actions of hysterical women,' she added, putting the book in my hands.

It was the work on animal magnetism by Alfred Binet and Charles Féré. A year ago I would have refused to read a line of it, as I should a treatise on spirit-rapping or table-turning, or any other contemptible means by which rogues gull fools; but I felt now that if I could swallow witchcraft, I had no right to be sceptical upon anything; so I opened the book and glanced at a page as I said:

'I remember now—this is the volume you hid so quickly the day Lawson called.'

'Yes. He knows the look of that book only too well; and if he suspected that I knew all it has taught me—ah, there would be very little hope for Mrs. Lawson and poor Olive.'

'Are there no limits to the power of that extraordinary man?' I murmured, as I read.

'He is not an extraordinary man,' she protested. 'Only a commonplace trickster, with no powers that a quite ordinary man may not possess.'

But by this time I was too interested in the page before me to make any response.

CHAPTER XL.

NOVEMBER TWENTY-EIGHTH—*continued.*

I READ in silence for quite half an hour, while Mary was quietly occupied in arranging some papers taken from her desk; then, looking up, I said:

'Well, my dear, this is not at all the sort of thing I expected. It seems to be the honest work of conscientious men of science, bent not upon advancing their own theory, but on compiling a series of facts to which every test that ingenuity can devise has been applied with a view to providing trustworthy data for the proper investigation of a most remarkable subject. Certainly these facts go far to prove that, by mechanical and other means, susceptible subjects may be rendered

absolutely obedient to the will of the operator. But do they prove that all which seems to me unaccountable in the conduct of these poor women at the Court is to be explained by Lawson's influence over them?'

'All,' she said, seating herself by my side and taking up the book I had laid down. 'See,' she continued, taking from between the last pages a strip of paper on which she had written some notes. 'Here are the dates of events that have occurred, with the pages of this book in which similar incidents are to be found. Shall we compare them?'

'By all means, my dear. Let us begin with the last extraordinary exhibition of Olive's perversity. You admit that Lawson for his own ends—to avoid a scene of jealousy which you professed to fear—had removed his influence from her. In fact, we saw her here in a normal condition. Now, how could he so renew his power over her as to make her return to the Court, from which she had fled with such eager hope?'

'By suggestion.'

'But he never said a word to her, did not lay a finger on her; they only saw each other as he passed through the booking-office.'

'That was on October fourteenth,' said Mary, regarding her memoranda; 'we shall find a similar case on page 364,' and, turning to the page, she read: '"The hypnotic sleep, which is produced with so much difficulty and delay in fresh subjects, occurs with alarming rapidity in those who have been long under treatment. Some of our subjects are hypnotized at once by a single abrupt gesture; and this may be effected in all places alike, and at any hour of the day. If we meet one of these subjects crossing the courtyard, an exclamation or abrupt gesture will cause her to stop short and become motionless in catalepsy. The hypnotic sleep may therefore be produced and brought to an end in an extremely short time —we might even say during the passage from one door to another. This is a somewhat important fact from the medico-legal point of

view. And, again, a suggestion may be given in a sleep of very short duration. We have observed that in the course of fifteen seconds we could throw a subject into a lethargy, then into somnambulism, suggest an act, and then awake him. It is therefore possible that an individual might make use of the fifteen seconds in which he found himself alone with a susceptible subject to inculcate an idea, a hallucination, or an impulse. We must not rely on a question of time in maintaining the impossibility of such a feat, since the time required to hypnotize and suggest to a habitual subject of experiment is so extremely short."'

'That seems conclusive, indeed. Well, now, do your facts account for Mrs. Lawson's inability to write her own name?'

Mary referred to her notes, and, finding the page indicated, read:

'"Give to a subject a suggestion of agraphia, and when she awakes examine her right hand. It is easily ascertained that the power of bending and extending the fingers remains

—although these movements are largely employed in the act of writing — so that the individual movement is not lost, but the possibility of co-ordinating these movements so as to accomplish a certain act. Another instance throws a still stronger light on this fact. Deprive a hypnotized subject of the power of writing the word 'not,' and she will be able to write at your request any other words, even those which contain the letters *n*, *o*, *t*, which proves that she has not lost the power of writing these letters separately, but the power of combining them. Systematic paralysis, therefore, consists in a disturbance of motor ordination."'

'That is it, Mary. I had settled in my own mind that it was some form of mental paralysis. And if it can be produced in this form, which the writer calls agraphia, it is easy to see how Olive could be transfixed at Lawson's will.'

'Oh, there are many instances of that——'

'We'll take that for granted. Well, well!

Of course Olive did not purloin the will. Lawson must have found out the secret place where it was kept.'

'His subjects can keep no secrets from him. Revealing secrets is quite a common thing in ordinary somnambulism. At school there was a girl who in her sleep told all that she wished to keep hidden; yet on awaking believed them still her own secrets.'

'Ah! you knew something about this subject, then, before——'

'A good deal,' she answered, with a sigh.

'It was that knowledge which led you to suspect Lawson's practices?'

She assented by a silent inclination of her head as she bent over the book.

'I read one instance there,' I continued, 'of a woman, by mere suggestion, imagining that a serpent lay at her feet. Well, if that can be done, it is not difficult to understand how Lawson can make his subjects love him or hate each other or us at his pleasure.'

She nodded again, and read aloud :

'"It is possible to suggest to a subject in a state of somnambulism fixed ideas, irresistible impulses, which he will obey on awakening with mathematical precision. The subject may be induced to write down promises, recognition of debts, admissions and expressions by which he may be grievously wronged. If arms are given to him he may also be induced to commit any crime which is prompted by the experimenter. We could cite several acts, to say the least unseemly, committed by hysterical patients, which were crimes in miniature performed by an unconscious subject, instigated by one who was really guilty, and who remained unknown. At the Salpêtrière a paper-knife has often been pressed in the hands of a hypnotic subject, who is told it is a dagger, with which he is ordered to murder some person present. On awakening, the patient hovers round his victim, and suddenly strikes him with such violence that I think it well to refrain from such experiments. These facts show that the hypnotic subject

may become the instrument of a terrible crime, more terrible since immediately after the act is accomplished all may be forgotten —the crime, the impulse, and its instigator. Some of the more dangerous of these suggested acts should be noted. These impulses may give rise to crimes or offences of which the nature is infinitely varied, but which retain the almost constant character of a conscious, irresistible impulse — that is, although the subject is quite himself and conscious of his identity, he cannot resist the force which impels him to perform an act which he would under other circumstances condemn. Hurried on by this irresistible force, the subject feels none of the doubts and hesitations of a criminal who acts spontaneously. He behaves with a tranquillity and security which would in such a case ensure the success of his crime."'

Closing the book as she rose, Mary added:

'What awful crime might he not have led Olive to commit if he had been less cowardly?

What crime might he not lead her to now, if desperation gave him courage?'

She returned to her occupation, and I took the book into my own room to study the subject still further. The more I read, the more fully convinced I became that Mrs. Lawson and Olive were the subjects of Lawson's mesmeric influence, and the more fully persuaded that they were not to be extricated from their perilous position by any legal process—which, indeed, if attempted, might only precipitate the catastrophe Mary had hinted at.

It was about five o'clock when Morton brought me a telegram from Mrs. Selby at Shipbourne, begging me to come immediately, as her daughter had been thrown from her horse and was seriously injured. I ordered the pony to be put in at once, selected the instruments that might be necessary, and called to Mary as I hastily slipped on my coat in the hall. She answered from the head of the stairs:

'I am dressing—do you want me?'

'No, my dear; I only wish to say that I may be late for dinner. I have to go over to Shipbourne at once.'

'Very well,' she replied; 'I will give Ann instructions.'

Bess was harnessed and in the trap by the time I reached the yard, for no one could be more expeditious than Morton in time of need, and I started off without a moment's delay. It is a hilly road from Wrotham to Shipbourne, and the church clock was striking six as I pulled up at Mrs. Selby's house.

'Well, my good girl, how's your young mistress now?' I asked of the servant who came to the door.

'Lor, sir, I don't know,' she answered, with a broad grin; 'Miss Edith ain't come in yet.'

At this moment Mrs. Selby herself came from the drawing-room with a look of surprise on her face.

'Your daughter, ma'am,' said I, 'is less seriously hurt than you thought, I hope?'

'My daughter hurt?—I really do not understand you, Dr. Harvey.'

I put the telegram in her hand with a feeling of irritation. She read it, and, shaking her head, said:

'It can't be Edith, for she has only been gone ten minutes, and not on horseback. This must be some cruel practical joke,' she added, clearly enjoying it, though she tried to look serious.

But I did not laugh, as I should, I think, even at my own expense, in finding myself victimized by a little pleasantry. It seemed to me that this trick covered some sinister design, and never in my life had I plied my whip as I did in urging Bess homewards. With a foreboding of the truth, I asked for Mary the moment I entered the house.

'She went out about ten minutes after you left, sir,' said Morton, 'and she has not returned.'

My heart sank with this verification of my fears; and yet I prayed that all I dreaded

might not be realized ; but a packet on my table crushed even that faint hope. It was addressed to me, and contained the papers I had seen Mary arranging in the afternoon. To them was pinned this brief note, in her writing:

'These are all the letters I have received from Mr. Lawson. When you read the last you will know what has become of me. You will show them to Mr. St. John, and conceal nothing from him, that he may take what steps are necessary for the protection of his mother and sister.'

I turned to Lawson's last letter—the one she had received this morning, and declined to show me then. Discarding the equivocal phrases with which he had thinly veiled his sentiments in former letters, he made in this an open avowal of love to Mary, and a proposal which admitted of no double interpretation. After a couple of pages of nauseous rodomontade description of his tortured feel-

ings, his distraction, his unconquerable passion, and such matters, he appealed to her compassionate heart (and, *sub rosa*, to her cupidity), and came to the point in these words:

'I offer myself to you as your slave, your creature. Do with me what you will. All that I have is yours—my fortune, my heart, and the devotion and obedience of a dog. You shall form no wish that I will not gratify; give no command that I will disobey. You cannot doubt my love, but you may question my constancy. Yet to remove this last objection I will assure your perpetual supremacy'—(Lord, what words!)—'by riveting a fetter upon my own neck which shall place me for ever at your mercy. In a word, I will go through the ceremony of marriage with you that you may have it in your power to punish me for infidelity to you by bringing me to Justice for this crime of bigamy. I will find means to take Dr.

Harvey out of the neighbourhood about five o'clock this evening, and will call shortly after to know your decision.'

The blow was not unexpected, but it stunned me nevertheless. Yet to think of Mary giving herself up body and soul to this vile wretch, even in such a cause, was revolting and still almost incredible. Assuredly, if I had seen this letter I should never have consented to so terrible a sacrifice. No! rather, in the face of any consequences that might ensue, I would have made known to Lawson my knowledge of his infamous designs, and taken measures to prevent Mary completing her own destruction.

I sat for some time with the packet before me, in a state of bewilderment and supine helplessness; and then mechanically took up Mary's note and read it through again. What was it in these few lines that chilled me? I could not expect her to offer an excuse for doing what she felt must be done. Though

her judgment was at fault for taking this course, she was clearly not culpable in acting in accordance with her principle and sense of right. Nor was it in her nature to cry up her own heroism and dilate upon the sentiments and feelings that had led her on to this final act of self-immolation. She was too honest, too English, to gush in a Wertherian spirit. To write briefly on such a subject was to write well. No ; it was not the brevity of the note that wounded me ; but a certain heartlessness in adding no word of farewell, no kind word to comfort me in the desolation that she must have known I should feel at losing her. And now I recollected that she had shown no sign of regret in making her preparations for departure—there was no clinging tenderness in her manner such as most of us feel in separating for ever from those we love. She had not even run down to bid me good-bye when I went out.

'To be sure,' I said to myself, 'she would

have betrayed her intention by doing that; and in such a tremendous crisis everything must have been made subservient in her mind to that one end.'

Just then Morton came in to tell me that dinner was served.

'Did Miss Smith take any luggage with her?' I asked as indifferently as I could.

'No, sir, only an 'and-bag, sir. But,' drawing a little closer and lowering his voice, 'as Hann was a-tidying up Miss Smith's room she picked up this, which Miss Smith must have dropped in dressing.' He took an old silver noble from his pocket and put it in my hand.

'Very good, Morton; you can take the covers.'

But it was long before I could find the heart to go into the next room for the farce of pretending to eat. I sat there, with Mary's note in one hand and that old silver piece in the other, looking from one to the other stupidly.

I recognised the noble. It was from a collection of ancient coins that I had amassed and kept in a drawer of my desk. The key of that desk I had entrusted to Mary ; but the key of the corner cabinet fitted the lock, and to be convinced that I was not deceiving myself I opened the desk and examined its contents. All the coins were gone, and the drawer in which we kept our loose cash was perfectly empty. Those coins were worth five or ten pounds at the most, and she had thought it worth while to take them at the last moment.

'What a strange compound of great virtues and of little faults !' I meditated. 'Of high principles and magnanimous purpose on the one hand, of petty weakness on the other. Of warm and generous impulse, and of cold calculation and heartless indifference. Well, I suppose there are anomalies in every character to those who see them, as I see hers, from the outside.'

And so, putting the papers in my desk and turning the key, I passed into the dining-room with a sick heart, that I might get through my meal before St. John came and still less palatable matter had to be discussed.

CHAPTER XLI.

NOVEMBER TWENTY-EIGHTH—*continued.*

I HAD scarcely risen from the table when St. John entered.

'Have you had your dinner, my dear fellow?' I asked.

'Yes, yes. What's the matter?' he demanded, my voice and gloomy looks betraying my dejection. 'Where is Mary?' he added, glancing quickly at the table, and then again at me.

'Gone,' I whispered.

He closed his lips firmly, and clenched his hands like one nerving himself for a terrible ordeal. But he made no comment, only fixing his penetrating eyes on me to read the worst from my face.

'Come into my room, Hal; you shall know all now,' said I.

He followed me silently, and stood at the table as if waiting for judgment while I opened my desk and took out the packet. I laid it down beside Binet and Féré's book, saying:

'These will explain the thing more briefly than I can.'

He took up the volume quickly, read the title, and, drawing a long breath, put it down slowly.

'That is the secret of his power, then!' he exclaimed.

'Yes; do you know anything about it?'

'What I have read in magazines and papers. Enough to make me doubt if there is anything in it but trickery and fraud.'

'You can doubt no longer. This is the explanation of everything that has been incomprehensible in your mother's case—and Olive's.'

'And has she fallen under his power—Mary?' he cried.

'No, no! She is made of stronger stuff than that. What she has done has been done with open eyes, with the sole motive of saving your mother and sister, and for your sake, Hal.'

He snatched up the packet, read Mary's note, glanced at the uppermost letter, and then, dropping them as though they were some loathsome uncleanliness, he sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

I said nothing, and quietly fetched the spirit-case. But at the clinking of the glass, as I was about to pour him a dram, he roused himself and checked me.

'No,' he cried savagely, 'I want no Dutch courage now! Let me work with a clear head. Great God!' he added, in a tone of profound self-reproach, 'if I had been a man, I might have saved the noblest woman that lives.'

'My dear fellow, you knew no more than I——'

'I knew that these women were suffering

by the practices of that man, whatever his power was. And instead of taking him by the throat and flinging him out of the house, I have been whining over my own incapacity—fretting away the months in maudlin inactivity, leaving it to a girl to make the effort I should have made, wrecking her life, wasting my own—dallying with my infernal self-indulgence. She saw it clearly enough, and sought to rouse me from my apathy to a sense of duty by playing on my weakness. Yet even jealousy could not move me to stamp the life out of that reptile.'

'Where are you going, Hal?' I asked uneasily, as he strode to the door.

'To do my duty—what there is left to do,' he answered, with such a look in his face as I had seen in Mary's when she wished she had been a man.

'If you are going to the Court you must let me go with you. You will not find Lawson at home, and we can only help the women there by gentleness.'

It was quite dark when we reached the Court. The front door was locked, and when we knocked we heard whispering in the hall. Presently a voice from a side window called :

'Who's there?'

'I,' answered St. John. 'Let me in.'

'If that's Mr. St. John, we've got orders not to admit you.'

St. John stepped briskly over the border, clapped his hands on the window-sill, sprang up, and was in the room before the window could be closed. And a minute later he opened the door to me.

'You will take your orders from me in future,' said he, turning to the frightened servants, 'or leave the house at once. I am master here now.'

'It's very awkward, sir, for us,' said the coachman in meek remonstrance. 'We were engaged by Mr. Lawson, and he left strict injunctions that no one was to go out or come into the house while he was away.'

'When does he return?'

'Don't know, sir; but when he do, what are we to say?'

'Nothing. I shall be here to settle with him. Where is Miss St. John?'

'In the morning-room, I believe, sir.'

We crossed the hall and entered the apartment, St. John closing the door softly behind him. A reading-lamp was on the table; beyond the circle of light reflected by the shade the obscurity at the further end of the big room was so impenetrable that I could not at first see Olive, but presently I descried a dim figure cowering beyond a heavy piece of furniture, whither she had gone probably with some idea of concealment, terrified by the stern voice of her brother. I admit that his manner inspired me also with apprehensive fear; but this was speedily dispelled, for, catching sight of her, he called her with the utmost gentleness:

'Livy dear,' he said, advancing; and at that sound of love and compassion she ran forward with a faint cry of joy, tottered, and

fell at his feet, bowing her head in shame, yet stretching forth her hands in supplication.

'I know all, dear,' said St. John, seating himself on the stool by which she was kneeling, and drawing her into his arms. 'More than you know yourself. Come, let me tell you your own history, and show you how these things happened which have distracted your mind and puzzled stronger heads than yours. See, here is Dr. Harvey, who has been trying to fathom the mystery for ever so long, and has only just got a glimpse into it.'

'Ay, my dear, that's true enough; and I should be still groping in the dark if my eyes had not been opened by someone with a keener wit than mine—or Hal's either, as far as that.'

The girl looked from him to me with hope and fear and joy and amazement all mingled in her face together, ready to burst into laughter or tears—in that dangerous hysterical condition produced by the systematic practice of her villainous stepfather.

I thought it better to leave them together, and withdrawing very gently, I made my way upstairs and knocked at the drawing-room door. Mrs. Lawson herself admitted me. She was alone. Her chair was drawn near the fire, and beside it was a reading-table with her books upon it. But it was obvious by her agitation that she had heard her son's voice below. She looked at me with furtive inquiry as she closed the door.

'Your son Harry is downstairs, madam,' said I; 'and as you may suppose it is an extraordinary occasion that has brought us here at this hour—nothing less, indeed, than the restoration of peace and happiness to your tormented minds.'

'Peace and happiness!' she exclaimed incredulously, 'in this world?'

'Yes, ma'am; with gentle, charitable thoughts, and feelings of gratitude and love to fit us for a better. With your permission I will take a chair, for I have more to say than can be said comfortably standing.'

'Love and gratitude!' she murmured, raising her hands and letting them fall on her knees as she seated herself. 'They have no place here.'

'But they should have for one who meditates upon a hereafter. We cannot eat our food with relish unless our minds be easy; how, then, can we be fit to take a place in heaven with hatred and rancour gnawing at our hearts? Come, madam, since our thoughts are turned this way, do you believe that men could be possessed of devils?'

''Tis written here,' said she, laying her hand upon the Book.

'At heart we are to-day what we were then. If in the past unhappy souls might be tortured by such fiends, they may be now.'

'Then, indeed, I am one of them,' she cried bitterly.

'Ay, truly, I believe it,' said I; 'but as those evil spirits were cast out then, so by the grace of Heaven shall they be cast out now.'

In this way, taking advantage of her mental

bias, and treating her as I would a patient whose system has to be gradually prepared for the administration of certain agents, I brought her little by little to regard her case from a purely material point of view, and then explained the physiological means by which Lawson had produced those hallucinations that caused her to regard her children as enemies. I also explained how he had practised the same villainous arts upon Olive, and showed the base motives that actuated him. Finally, I revealed the purpose with which he had left the Court, though I could not bring myself to mention Mary's name in connection with this purpose, and told her how St. John, from a sense of love and duty, had come hither to protect her and his sister from the evil designs of Lawson, who certainly would never again be permitted to cast a shadow upon their lives.

But though I argued this matter extremely well (to my mind), I failed to convert her entirely from those ideas that Lawson had

fixed in her mind. His influence was too recent to be overcome immediately. I pointed this out to her, and said as I rose to end our long interview :

'Madam, the day that you can write your own name again, your evil genius will have ceased to hold power over you. And when that day comes you will call your children, and take them to your heart—never to leave it again till that heart ceases to beat.'

When I went downstairs, I found Olive seated on her brother's knee, her cheek against his, his arm about her waist. The lamp was turned down, for the poor child had been crying; and she cried again as she threw her arms about my neck, and tried to give expression to her gratitude and affection in words.

'Well, Hal,' said I; 'you have got on better with your patient than I have with mine. But there is hope—the worst is past, and she will get strength and health and be your own dear mother again, my little

Olive, ere long. But we must not go too quickly—Nature shall help us. Rest and reflection will do more than any drastic remedy —rest and reflection, with a little tonic for both of you, my dear,' I added, patting Olive's hollow cheek. 'Let your mother hear your voices about the house, and your happy laughter too, I hope, and let her see you in the garden from her window. Wait till she calls you before you visit her room.'

They came to the door with me, but St. John accompanied me to the gate, as if he wished to speak of Mary. And yet he could find no words to utter.

'Good-bye, my dear boy!' said I, grasping his hand as we parted—'good-night. I will run over early to-morrow morning, you may be sure, to see how you are getting on.'

'Do, there's a dear old fellow,' said he, still grasping my hand. 'You may have something to tell me. Some news of her.'

'Yes, yes,' I replied, 'I know your thoughts, dear lad;' and then, to give a cheer-

ful note to our parting, I added, 'Well, well, the battle is as good as won.'

'Yes,' he answered, with deep emotion, as he turned away. 'But at what a price!'

'But at what a price!' Those words rang in my ears all that long mile and a half that lay between the Court and home. A dreary trudge—drearier by the knowledge that no bright and welcoming face would meet me at the end—that the house would be silent, and dark, and desolate — like a house of death.

I could think only of Mary and her terrible fate—recollecting the brightest incidents in our past life to compare them with the dull and void existence that lay before me, the still more sombre future that stretched before Mary. What would become of her? Would she abandon herself to a life of worldly pleasures and fictitious gaiety, profiting by the passionate submission of Lawson to her will, and taking advantage of his infatuation to throw his money to the right and left upon

trifles and luxury? I could not even hope that she would procure temporary happiness by such means, and the forgetfulness of that better life that she had seemed so fitted to lead. The book had taught me much, and I foresaw that the calculating villain would merely obtain the ascendancy over her will which he had gained over his wife's and Olive's, by simple contact and association. I had read again in this volume that though a subject may resist the subtle influence at first, and for some time be proof against all the ordinary means of producing hypnotism, catalepsy inevitably results from a persistent course of hypnotic treatment. This Lawson must have known, and offered her a safeguard for the future, convinced that once under his dominion, she would have no power to make use of that safeguard. And when that time came, when his foul desires were satiated, would he suffer her to employ his money as she wished? Not he! Would he even keep her in decency, and preserve her from the

last degradation of abandonment? Common-sense answered 'No!'

When I thought of the fate awaiting her, and of what she had achieved, St. John's words echoed again in my mind, 'At what a price!'

CHAPTER XLII.

NOVEMBER TWENTY-NINTH.

THE first postal delivery is at half-past seven. I was at the garden-gate this morning when the old postman hobbled round the corner.

'Have you anything for me, Robert?' I asked, as he touched his hat.

'Nothing this morning, sir. Going to have a fine day?'

'Are you sure there is nothing? I expected a letter by the first post.'

He examined his packet of letters to see that none had been misplaced, and, shaking his head, said:

'No, sir, ne'er a one. Next post, I dussay, sir.'

'Yes, Robert, I hope so!'

But my heart misgave me even as I spoke. Mary would have written last night if she intended to write, I said to myself. It was more consistent with her character to be silent, to give no clue to her whereabouts. Once more she had broken with the past, and it was better for her and those that loved her that she should be forgotten.

To meet her in the morning fresh and bright at the breakfast-table was one of my chief delights. Over our teacups we would lay our little plans for the day, each seeking some pleasant occupation that we might enjoy in common, and exchanging our ideas about the weather and the flower-borders and such-like matters as they were suggested by our glances through the window ; and now to think that I must pour out the tea for myself and eat in silence, with no companion but lame Jack, so disheartened and chilled me that I resolved I would escape that wretchedness and go to breakfast with my friends at the Court. 'Hal will be glad to see me,' thought

I, 'though I bring no news, and together we may prop each other up with some show of fortitude.' So, taking my stick from the stand, I called to Ann that I was going to breakfast with Mr. St. John at the Court, and should very likely stay there to lunch, and trudged off.

Wondering, as I neared the post-office, whether by any accident the old postmaster had overlooked a letter, I glanced in at the open door as I passed. To my surprise I saw Morton standing at the little counter where there is accommodation for writing telegrams, his arms spread, his head inclined well on one side, clearly engaged in the laborious undertaking of filling in a form. 'Who on earth can he be corresponding with by telegraph?' I wondered, as I walked on. Just opposite the church I pulled up short, as it occurred to my mind that Morton had accepted bribes from Lawson to deliver letters to Mary, and might possibly have been charged by him to communicate any movement on my part that

took place in his absence. With this suspicion I turned back, with the determination to ask my man point blank what he was doing there at this hour, when he ought to be at his duties in the house. But he was gone from the post-office when I got back to it. I heard the clickety-click of the instrument inside, so I entered, and spoke to the young woman who was working it.

'My man was in here two or three minutes ago writing a telegram,' I said.

'Yes, sir; I'm just sending it off.'

'Can you let me see it?'

'Well, I don't know, sir. I think it's against the rules.'

'I may know where it is addressed to?'

'Oh, it's for Mr. Lawson, sir.'

'Where?'

The girl reddened, and with increasing reluctance, which seemed to indicate that she had promised Morton not to speak of this matter, she answered:

'I can only tell you it's in London, sir;

and I don't think I ought to tell that any more than I ought to give up a letter that's been put in the box.'

'Quite right, my good girl,' said I; 'I don't wish you to do wrong.'

This was a curious coincidence, to be sure, but not an extraordinary one. The telegraph office did not open before eight. Morton could not have learnt what happened at the Court in time to despatch a message last night. He had probably gone there this morning to make inquiries of the servants, and, reckoning upon the regularity of my habits, had felt himself quite safe in getting back in time to serve breakfast at half-past eight.

St. John himself opened the door to me when I reached the Court—his face worn and haggard, but not without hope.

'What news?' he asked eagerly as our hands met.

'None of her, my dear fellow, but——' and then I narrated what I had seen and heard at

the post-office. A fierce light flashed in his eyes as he listened, and when he had heard all he said :

'I'll give that fellow a sovereign if his telegram brings Lawson here to-day.'

'Have you decided what attitude you shall take ?' I inquired.

He laughed with a jerk of his head for response ; and when I asked him with an uncomfortable apprehension of coming mischief what he intended to do, he answered quickly :

'Do ! Why, cure him of any disposition to show his face in this neighbourhood again.'

'Don't you think, my dear Hal,' I suggested persuasively, 'that we might telegraph to my friend Fawcett, at Maidstone—as a lawyer, you know——'

'Oh,' he exclaimed impatiently, 'we can have his aid when it's needed. I can manage this affair single handed. We will have justice first and law afterwards.'

I shook my head ominously, holding personal violence in horror, and he continued :

'What can Fawcett do—procure a legal separation, a divorce when my mother is in a condition to agree to it. That will take months. In the meantime how is the law to protect these poor souls against the insidious attack of such a man as Lawson? Fawcett, with all the law to back him, can do nothing to punish this unrecognised crime, or to prevent it. In a case like this a man must make his own laws and defend his property by brute force. Mary, in her wisdom, saw this, and, failing to awake my sluggish spirit by other means, forced me by withdrawing Lawson to come here for the defence of my mother and Olive.'

I nodded reluctant assent, with a sigh for the failure of poor Mary's first endeavour.

And his thoughts must have run in the same direction, for with his chin on his breast, his eyes cast down upon the ground, he presently muttered in the low voice of shame:

'If I had only behaved like a man, this would not have been. I left her no alterna-

tive but the abandonment of her purpose, and she was too devoted to accept that. As long as I live, remorse will hang upon my conscience—a leaden weight never to be cast off.'

'Perhaps,' I suggested, to lighten that burden if I might, 'had she told you earlier——'

'I have thought of that in the night—attempting to palliate my crime—for it is a crime,' he said fiercely, 'for a man to yield to temptation whether his sin be punishable or not. She let me know all that she dared tell me, urging me by every conceivable incentive to do my duty, and I was deaf and blind. Without proof of his guilt I was powerless to take any measures against that man, and when she gave me proofs I did nothing. At the time when I came back here to seek Olive I knew that he was a villain, and it was then that I should have taken him by the throat and flung him out of the house like a dog. But I was thinking not of Olive and my mother, but of my own supposed grievance

against Mary, and mad jealousy was the only feeling that stirred me.'

I saw no good to be gained by dwelling on his past faults and follies; and so, after a lengthy silence, and wishing to turn the subject, I said, touching the handle of a chisel that stuck out of his jacket-pocket:

'I see you have found something to do. There is nothing like work when one is in trouble.'

'You shall see my work,' said he, with a grim smile, and, taking the key from his pocket, he opened the door of Lawson's study and led the way in.

The air was rancid with the reek of a lamp that had burnt itself out. The shutters were closed. I could see nothing till he threw them back. Then I found the drawers of the bookcase open, their locks removed, and the table strewn with books and papers.

'You know this,' said he, turning up a red-covered volume, identical with Mary's copy of Binet and Féré's work on animal

magnetism. 'There are a score of others on the same subject—these are the studies of this ex-minister of religion. They have torn the scales from my eyes.'

Turning over the books I discovered the pages ripped from the book Lawson had borrowed from me ; they contained a verbatim report of lectures upon mesmerism delivered by James Braid before the Royal Society.

Whilst I was making these observations, St. John was examining the inside of an open drawer in the bookcase.

'There should be a secret drawer about here,' said he, tapping a panel with his chisel. 'We shall find the spring inside the drawer. These things are all alike—secret only to fools.'

Pressing something as he spoke, a panel slid out about half an inch. He drew it out still further and slipped in his hand.

'This is odd,' said he, showing me a bouquet of faded flowers that crumbled in his hand. 'Fancy a wretch of that kind having

sentiment—fostering the tender recollections that flowers convey. What else ?' he added, plunging his hand again into the recess after flinging the bouquet in the grate. He drew out a bundle of letters tied with a faded ribbon. They were written in a woman's hand, and, after glancing at one in silence, St. John exclaimed, handing the letter to me :

' Thank heaven ! there will be no need to drag Mary's name into court to procure a divorce.'

The letter was not six months old, and was dated from Maidstone ; on the first page there was reference to an event which was sufficient to prove Lawson's infidelity. I handed it back to St. John with a nod of satisfaction, but I said to myself : ' If we had only found these matters out before !' Then I hurried out to meet Olive, whose voice I heard upon the stairs. She was running down swiftly, and I noted with pleasure the change that a night of peace and that joyful awakening to happy hopefulness had produced in her. She

seemed to have won back her youth and prettiness in the radiant light that animated her face.

'I have come to take breakfast with you, my dear,' said I, 'if it is not too late.'

'Oh, Harry,' she cried, breaking away from my arms and running to her brother as he came from the study, 'what can you think of me for sleeping so late the first morning? Indeed, dear,' she added, still resting her hands upon his shoulders and looking up into his face, 'it was thinking of coming down early to meet you that kept me awake so long —and then, just as it was growing light, and I said to myself, "I must get up in a few minutes," I—I must have fallen asleep.'

We went into the breakfast-room, where Olive's womanhood shone out through the anxiety that overclouded us; for, seeing her brother bowed down with trouble and me so burdened with secret grief that I could make scarcely a pretence of cheerfulness, she exerted herself to raise our spirits by leading us to

talk upon subjects of a pleasant and hopeful kind. But for all her sweet endeavours our thoughts dwelt elsewhere, and as soon as we rose from the table St. John, leading me into the hall, said :

'That rascal may be wise enough to keep out of my way. But that's not enough. You spoke of Fawcett. Send him to me. If the law can cripple Lawson he shall have enough of it. And until he is crippled I shall not stir from this house. Mary may trust me now. Tell her so,' and disregarding my look of astonishment at this command, he continued, 'Tell her I will finish the work she has begun.'

'My dear fellow,' said I, 'you speak as if I knew where to find the poor girl.'

'Surely,' said he, regarding me with scarcely less surprise than I exhibited myself, 'you do not suppose that she will accept that man's conditions—the villainous offer he made in that letter ? Oh, if that were possible,' he added, that terrible look of despair returning

to his face for a moment, 'if such a fate as that impended over her I could not rest here another minute—even to protect my mother and Olive. No; she will come back spotless as she left us. She went away simply to trick that villain—to give me another chance of redeeming the past. I know it. The proof is in those letters she left for me. There is no necessity to accept Lawson's infamous conditions. She would not sully her good work by throwing such a burden of responsibility upon me. It isn't in her nature.'

'My boy, I hope with all my heart and soul you may be right in these conclusions,' was all I could say as I wrung his hand in parting; but as I walked homewards, I said to myself that if he knew what I knew of Mary's history his conclusions might be different. And this reflection made me rejoice that I had not yet told him of that other danger which may have precipitated Mary's flight.

I went over to the little post-office in

Ightham, and sent a telegram to Fawcett, begging him to come to me immediately, and thence I walked on towards Wrotham. A train was running into the station as I neared the railway at Boro' Green. Might Lawson have returned from London by that? I asked myself, looking at my watch. Calculating the time it would take for the delivery of Morton's telegram, which I could not doubt was sent to tell him of St. John's movements, and for the journey, I decided that it was not possible. Nevertheless, on coming to the bridge, I looked down on the platform. And there I came to an abrupt stand, for within a couple of yards from me Lawson was slowly toiling up the steps. No one was with him.

I waited for him, with no defined purpose in my mind, and he, raising his down-bent head as he reached the turnstile, met me face to face, blinking his colourless eyes, and with conscience-stricken dread in his cadaverous features.

He was the only passenger, and we were alone.

'Where is Mary?' I asked sternly, as I blocked the way.

He looked at me for a moment in silence, with that expression that seemed ever to be suspecting discovery.

'I might ask you that question, and with better reason,' he replied, vindictive hatred contracting his brows; and drawing down the corners of his thin, livid lips. 'You know where she is better than I. You have helped her to deceive me—you are both in the plot, and cunning one as the other. It's you who assisted her to invent these lies about St. John, who I know is miles away from here. You, who have made a fool of me, to save her from hanging! Oh, I know! You've come here to exult in my discomfiture. Well, go home and tell her you have seen me—laugh at me for a simpleton. But they laugh best who laugh last, and my turn will come soon enough. She shan't escape me—this pretty

little friend of yours. I'll have my revenge. And bid her, when she stands in the dock, thank you for helping her play this trick, which shall bring her there.'

He spoke hoarsely, choking with mortification and rage; the saliva stood upon his lips, and he looked as though he could vent his venomous spite upon me as he pushed his way past me and turned towards Ightham.

Should I let him go on and receive the greater punishment awaiting him? My dread of violence prevailed, and following hastily, I called him back.

'Stop!' said I. 'Little as you deserve consideration, I warn you not to go to the Court.'

'What do you mean?' he asked, turning now with a fearful apprehension in his face. 'Why am I not to go to my house?'

'Because it is yours no longer. Harry St. John is there, and knows your crimes. Your secret drawers are opened: your books reveal your practices, already known to Mary and to

me, and St. John waits there to punish you for them. I warn you, not for your sake, but for his. If he lay hands upon you, he may have to answer for your death.'

CHAPTER XLIII.

NOVEMBER TWENTY-NINTH—*continued.*

HAVING thus turned the tables upon Lawson, I went off, leaving him standing there in the middle of the road, with a look of blank dismay in his face which was delightful to behold. And when a bend in the road gave me an opportunity of glancing back, I perceived him from the corner of my eye still fixed there. He had no reason to doubt the accuracy of my statement, and evidently no stomach to put it to the test. He dared not go on—indeed, he must have known not which way to turn. Where was he to go? What was he to do? I said to myself with satisfaction that he might very well stand

there for an hour before he could find an acceptable answer.

I felt highly pleased with myself for preventing an encounter between St. John and Lawson ; for there is something debasing at all times in personal violence, and there was no triumph and little satisfaction of any kind to be got by thrashing so spiritless a cur as Lawson. Besides which, to such a coward as he, the dread of the bodily suffering is more terrible than the pain itself, as I have seen over and over again in those who have endured months of agony with a troublesome tooth rather than submit to the momentary operation of having it out. So I reckoned that the fear of a thrashing would deter him effectually from going near the Court while St. John was there. But what pleased me still more was to find St. John's conclusions verified, and know that my dear Mary had not yielded to the temptation of worldly advantages laid before her by Lawson. His return, his fury, and his threats left no doubt

in my mind that she had tricked him—taking him once more to London, and there slipping adroitly out of his hands in the very moment of triumphant possession.

I quickened my pace, thinking that I should find Mary at home.

'Has Miss Smith returned?' I asked, the moment that Morton opened the door.

'No, sir. Haven't seen anything of Miss Smith.'

'Are there any letters for me?'

'Yes, sir; two came in by the second post. They're on your table, sir.'

At the first glance I saw they were not addressed by her hand. I opened them, nevertheless, with a faint hope. One contained a circular; the other a begging letter.

Why had she not returned? Clearly there had been no time for Lawson to execute his threat. But the recollection of that threat inspired a fear in my mind. He said that the place was still watched. Was that a threat? Had he, fearing treachery on her part, obtained

a warrant the day before, and instructed Matthews to put it in force if she returned? Putting these questions to myself, I went through the garden, opened the wicket, and looked into Mill Lane. There, sure enough, a man was sauntering along with his hands in his pockets. It was neither Matthews nor the cabman, but a man who looked as if he might be a shopman out of work.

He sauntered no further down than the stable gate, then he turned about and came back with the same leisurely gait. Our eyes met as he drew near, and there was a peculiarly knowing look in his.

'Well, my man,' said I, tackling him at once; 'and who are you?'

He regarded me with a complacent grin on his not ill-looking face, and replied:

'Why, sir, if you must know, I'm a policeman.'

'And what are you doing here?'

His grin broadened a little as he answered, after a moment's pause:

'You'll excuse me, sir, but that's my business, and not yours. Good-morning.' And with that he sauntered on again.

If Mary had been taken he would not have been here. So far, so good. But she might return at any moment, and then what would happen?

With this and other questions of a like kind agitating me, I went indoors and bade Morton put the pony in at once. As soon as the chaise was at the door I drove to the end of the village and pulled up at the cross-roads, that I might give Mary timely warning if she appeared.

I waited there until between eleven and twelve, when Fawcett came in sight, his chin in the air, and his glasses on the tip of his long nose.

'Did you come by train?' I asked.

He nodded.

'Was the up train in?'

'Just left the platform as we stopped.' He saw by my manner that the case was urgent,

and abstained for once from his customary divagations.

'You did not overtake Miss Smith on the road?' I inquired anxiously.

'No; but I saw another friend of yours at the station. Mr. Lawson was on the down platform. Perhaps he was waiting for her.'

It seemed as if he had already divined the situation of affairs.

'Was he alone?'

'No; talking to a little old ferrety-faced man.'

That was undoubtedly Matthews. With him and Lawson waiting to apprehend Mary, there was little prospect of her returning to me.

'Fawcett, you are wanted at Higham Court. Lawson's villainy is discovered,' said I. 'St. John has taken possession of the place, and legal steps must be taken to prevent Lawson doing further mischief.'

'Who's Mrs. Lawson's banker? Have they stopped payment of cheques?' he asked, jumping in the chaise with alacrity.

'I don't know anything about that. Can you drive?'

'Quicker than you, I'll be bound. Give me the reins.'

'I must go back. There's another affair calls my attention, and—— Listen, Fawcett,' I cried, following the chaise as he lashed poor old Bess; 'you come back to me as soon as you can be spared.'

He made no reply, for all his attention was centred in working Bess into a gallop. I returned slowly to the house. The man was still sauntering along the path as I passed Mill Lane. I went indoors, but anxiety would not let me stay there; so presently I wandered out into the road again, to pace up and down the footpath with my eye on the bend of the road, though reason told me I had nothing to hope for.

It may have been about half an hour after Fawcett had left me when a fly came into sight, and pulled up before my gate, and Lawson thrust his head from the window.

'Are you alone, Dr. Harvey?' he asked, with an apprehensive glance at the house.

'As you see,' said I.

'You will give me your word of honour that St. John is not in your house?'

'He is at the Court; and he will stay there, I promise you.'

'I must speak to you in private upon a matter that you cannot afford to disregard.'

As he spoke he stepped out of the fly, followed by Matthews, who saluted me with an impudently familiar nod.

'I am willing to hear what you have to say; but that old rascal shall not enter my house again. One at a time, if you please.'

'You will stay outside with Williams,' said Lawson, addressing Matthews. 'If anyone comes, whistle.'

I led Lawson into my room, and there closing the door, I said:

'Now, Mr. Lawson, what have you got to say to me?'

'I find that your statement is correct. Mr.

St. John broke into my house last night, and has taken forcible possession of it. As I have no desire to subject myself to the fury of a madman, he must maintain the position he has obtained by fraud and violence until legal means are employed to remove him. But that delay is not agreeable to me. It does not suit me to be homeless, even for a few days. I wish you to tell him this, Dr. Harvey, as you have some sort of affection for the unfortunate fellow, and let him know that I will overlook his violence, and, in consideration of family ties, take no proceedings to punish this insolent violation of right and justice, if he promises amendment of his conduct and quits the neighbourhood immediately.'

The man's impudent assurance took my breath away for a moment, then with a laugh, I said :

'You will have to offer a very much stronger inducement than that to get St. John out of Higham Court, I assure you. He is

no more likely to turn out at your threat than he is to apologise at your desire ; and your legal proceedings, let me tell you, are as powerless as either. He has nine points of the law in his favour, to begin with, and the tenth — to my certain knowledge the tenth is at this very moment in course of preparation.'

'What do you mean? Please use phrases that I can comprehend.'

'Here it is, as plain as you can desire. One of the best lawyers in the county has just driven over to the Court in my chaise to take instructions from Mrs. Lawson for entering an immediate action against you for divorce.'

This staggered him for a moment ; but, recovering confidence, he said, with a malicious grin :

'The case will break down, for you can produce no evidence of cruelty or any other offence that a jury will accept. My rights will be vindicated, and,' he added, dropping his

voice and thrusting his wicked face nearer to mine, 'you know enough to understand how I shall employ them.'

'I don't need that assurance to believe you capable of any villainy,' said I.

But he did not seem to hear me, for, half closing his eyes, and still looking in my face, he exclaimed :

'So this is the reason she has not come back. I see the whole design now. But you count too much upon the success of your plot for I can prove that this Miss Smith left the hotel in a cab half an hour after she went up to her room, and in my absence.'

'Thank God!' said I to myself.

'And that evidence proving my innocence, what remains?'

'The letters in your secret drawer,' cried I boldly.

He started as if he had been struck.

'Who has dared to commit this outrage?' he gasped.

'St. John ; and he dare do more than that

to avenge the wrongs of his mother and sister. Beware of him, I say again. It is you who have to promise amendment and keep out of the neighbourhood. You have neither force nor law to defend you. The letters you have left are sufficient to dispossess you forever of any place in Mrs. Lawson's house, and with those in evidence, happily it will not be necessary to produce the incriminating correspondence you have addressed to Mary, which she left in my hands to prove your guilt.'

This again silenced him for a minute. When he spoke again, it was in the desperate tone of one forced to the last extremity.

'You have played this game well amongst you,' said he bitterly, 'but it is not won yet. I have still a trump card in my hand, and that's a high one. Shall we play out the last trick, or draw the game by a compromise? That's the question you have to put to St. John.'

'He will accept no compromise that gives

you power to practise further iniquity upon his mother and sister, be sure of that.'

'Well, I can afford to part with the pair of them. Let Mr. St. John give me a proper undertaking to commit no further violence upon me, and make such a pecuniary settlement as may be agreed upon by our respective solicitors, and,' he paused for an instant, 'and I will agree to leave the country and not return to it.'

'Suppose St. John declines to accept a compromise; refuses, as it is more than likely he will, to make any conciliatory terms with such a scoundrel as you—what then?'

'Why, then,' cried he, striking the table, 'by Heaven, Mary shall suffer for her crime! And if she hang — as I pray with all my soul she may — then you and St. John can share the credit of her punishment between you.'

'A very pretty threat, but nothing more. You have to first catch your hare, Mr. Lawson.'

'I'm not fool enough to make threats that I cannot enforce, or to expect any concession from St. John unless it could be shown that it is to his advantage. If you had suffered Matthews to come in here, as I proposed he should, he could have written in your presence an agreement to find Miss Smith in four-and-twenty hours or forfeit all payment for his services and the expenses he has been put to. Shall I call him in now? If he refuses these conditions, I will abandon my position a once.'

'I have not the slightest doubt that he would accept any conditions, or make any compact, that you choose to dictate.'

'Take my offer to St. John. He shall have time for consideration. I will send Matthews here at ten o'clock to-night to take his instructions from you. You yourself shall tell him whether Mary is to live or die.'

He marched to the door with a sardonic grin at the trepidation I felt at the terrible

responsibility he had craftily thrown upon my shoulders; but, stopping there, he turned and added:

'Let St. John understand that if he refuses my conditions I shall take this act of vengeance in payment of what I have lost through your gang.'

I nodded, and followed him into the passage.

Morton was in the hall dusting the barometer. He dived his hand quickly into his pocket as Lawson approached, but catching sight of me at that instant, he drew out his handkerchief, coughed, and then went on dusting. At that significant movement of his Lawson stopped an instant, but finding me upon his heels, moved on with a whispered word which my ear failed to catch at that distance.

'What was the purport of this?' I asked myself. 'What have you to do when you have finished dusting, Morton?' I asked.

'Nothing, sir.'

'Then go up in the attic and set the lumber-room straight.'

His compressed lips showed that he disliked the job exceedingly, and I felt sure that I had balked him in some purpose suggested by that whispered word from Lawson.

CHAPTER XLIV.

NOVEMBER TWENTY-NINTH—*continued.*

With this conviction I went out to see if Lawson was waiting for my man to come to him; but he was gone, and had drawn off his forces—neither Matthews nor the man who called himself a policeman being anywhere in sight. Nevertheless, having nothing else to do, I kept watch upon the road until Morton came to tell me that lunch was served, when, feeling pretty sure that there was no longer any danger of further collusion between them, I went in and sat down to my solitary meal, forgetting this incident in the graver considerations that faced me.

I was rising from the table when Fawcett returned from the Court.

'Don't take the pony out,' said he, as I was sending Morton with the trap to the stable. 'I shall want you to drive me to the station in half an hour. Now, then,' he added, bustling into the house, 'give me a glass of sherry and a biscuit, and tell me all the particulars of this case. I can only get part of them out of Mr. St. John. Where's that remarkably clever young lady, Miss Smith?' he asked, glancing at the single cover on the table.

'Unfortunately I can't tell you.'

'That's the mystery, is it? I thought she must be mixed up in this business by St. John's reserve on certain points. Got a telegraph-office in the place?' clapping a biscuit in his mouth, and then pulling out a note-case and pencil.

'Yes. Shall Morton take your telegram?'

'No. Never trust open messages to servants. Don't like Morton. Never have since the day he returned my sovereign. Lawson's bank-book shows a small deposit at the bank.

Not the sort of man to keep a large one. Stop any overdrawing of account, though. When did she go?' he asked abruptly, still writing.

'Yesterday evening.'

'Perry and Lovegrove,' said he, beginning another telegram. 'Those are the men. Have the best counsel in the profession. Smash that confounded rascal to atoms. Leave him not a rag to his back. Knew there must be some hocus-pocus going on there. You're a queer sort of a medical man not to have found it years ago. Hypnotism—never knew there was anything in it except for travelling conjurers. Who did find it out? Not you, I warrant.'

'No; I'm ashamed to say I regarded the matter in the same light as you. It was Mary Smith who discovered it.'

'St. John's a better fellow than I thought he was.'

'Yes. He's like a good wine that has to go through its malady before it——'

'I always said that girl had a lot in her. Why did she go away?'

'I will tell you as soon as you have done writing.'

'More in her than a dozen men could boast of!'

He wrote the last words, pocketed his note-case, sprang up, tossed off his glass of sherry all in a moment, and, taking half a dozen biscuits from the case, said:

'Show me the way to the post-office, and let me have your side of the story as briefly as you can.'

We walked slowly through the village, I giving him, as concisely as possible, such particulars with regard to Mary as St. John from delicacy or want of knowledge might have withheld, he munching biscuits and stopping occasionally at points that interested him to face me and scan my countenance over the top of his glasses. I had run through the history briefly when we reached the post-office; he went in to despatch his telegrams.

and I waited outside. While I was standing there old Robert came out from the side door with his hand full of letters for the afternoon delivery.

'Have you anything for me now?' I asked.

'No, sir; nothing this afternoon. I left you three this morning, you know, sir,' he added, with a grin and a remonstrative wag of his head.

'Two, Robert—only two.'

'Three, sir,' he replied with conviction; 'two long uns and a square un.'

'No square one—only two long.'

'Three, sir. I give 'em to your man, anyhow. You ask him,' said he, going on his way.

Fawcett had come from the shop, and stood listening, as he quietly munched his last biscuit.

'Well, this is the strangest thing in the world,' cried I. 'I am perfectly confident there were but two letters. Morton himself, I remember, told me there were two.'

'You had got up to Lawson's visit this morning,' said Fawcett, calmly ignoring my perplexity. 'Now go on.'

I told him of the ultimatum Lawson had charged me to deliver to St. John.

'Knew she must have a history, with that face and manner,' he remarked; 'but have you proved that she committed these offences with which she is charged?'

'No; but she tacitly admitted——'

'Tacit admission counts for nothing. I ask you if you have proved the truth of these charges?'

'The murder——' I began, but he pulled me up again.

'Killing is not murder until the accused is convicted of killing with felonious intent.'

'Well,' said I, a little testily, 'I've certainly no proof of that; but the evidence of dishonesty is, I fear, only too conclusive.'

'Out with your conclusive evidence, if you please, Dr. Harvey,' said he.

Feeling that I must keep no secrets from

him, I told him first how I had lost the ten-pound note, and then of the loss of my old coins, one of which Morton had found in Mary's room.

'Does it strike you as being at all anomalous,' he asked, stopping me at the corner of the road, and looking down his long nose into my face—'in any way peculiar that a woman who can risk her life and honour to save a friend, can sink at the same time to the level of a petifogging pilferer?'

'Most remarkable! I can only account for it by ascribing this blemish in her character to a freak of nature. I have seen a rose of perfectly pure strain with a streak of——'

'We are not discussing vegetables,' said he, 'but the serious case of a young woman of noble character charged with a miserable petty vice. Now, answer my questions without ambling over the field of natural history. To begin with the loss of the ten-pound note. When Miss Smith had paid the bill from the

money in your desk, what did she do with the key ?'

'Brought it back to me immediately.'

'When did you discover that the note was gone ?'

'The next day.'

'The key did not leave your hands in the meantime ?'

'No.'

'What sort of lock is there on this desk where you keep a hundred pounds or so ?'

'An ordinary lock.'

'The sort of lock that might be picked with a bit of bent wire—an iron skewer from the kitchen, for instance ?'

'I—I—I can't say. I never tried,' I stammered, thunderstruck by the insinuation conveyed in Fawcett's suggestion.

'What did you do with the key after that ?'

'Gave it to Mary, that she might take what she wanted in future.'

'To remove the temptation of taking it dishonestly ?'

'Yes.'

He nodded, and went on a few steps in silence; then he said, stroking the top of his nose reflectively:

'That must be awkward. How do you manage when you want something from your desk in Miss Smith's absence?'

'Well, I've another key that fits it—the key of my cabinet.'

He stopped short, as he asked in a mild, persuasive tone:

'Did you ever leave that key in the door by accident?'

'I know certainly that I did so once.'

'Is it possible'—in the same amiable tone —'that you had left it in the door at the time when that note was taken, think you?'

'It—it is not impossible. I did not think of that.'

He jerked his head contemptuously.

'Well, go on to the next bit of conclusive evidence,' said he. 'What was the value of the coin Morton found in Miss Smith's room?'

'A shilling or eighteenpence.'

'And the coins that were not returned?'

'About ten or twenty pounds, perhaps.'

'Of course the desk was cleared out?'

'Yes.'

'Had Morton any reason to believe that Miss Smith would not come back?'

'I believe he had. But I must point out one thing, Fawcett. He couldn't have opened the cabinet, for I had the key in my pocket that time.'

'What of that? It's sufficient that you left it in the door for one night or five minutes somewhen. Any tinker would make a key from a pattern printed in a piece of soap. Now we come to the last incident. The postman told you just now that he gave Morton three letters this morning. You say you received only two from him. Will you be kind enough to tell me,' he asked with a sneer, 'if you have any reason to think that Miss Smith took the third?'

'Why, I believe it came from her.'

'So do I; but I thought you might have the ingenuity to twist the facts about in order to exculpate your servant at the expense of a friend!'

'Your sarcasms are merited, but they are not necessary, Fawcett, for my humiliation,' said I, deeply grieved to think of the error I had committed.

'The case is as clear as the sun at mid-day. You bring home a young woman, shrewd and penetrating, whose practical management upsets the pleasant arrangements of this precious pair of servants, and puts a stop to the systematic course of petty pilfering which has doubtless been going on for years. They take the first opportunity your negligence affords them of recouping themselves and throwing suspicion on this young lady, whom they would be only too glad to see expelled from the house. To that end they very willingly play into the hands of Lawson, and, knowing his purpose, make a final sweep of all that is to be cleared to cast additional suspicion and

discredit upon Miss Smith. But their game does not end there. They are still in the pay of Lawson. That is proved by the telegram sent this morning, and knowing that any information respecting Miss Smith and her relations with you are of value, they purloin the letter from her delivered this morning, to hand over to Lawson on the first opportunity. He may not know the value of that letter. We do; for probably it contains the address where Miss Smith is now in concealment. If she has actually committed a punishable offence—manslaughter, for instance—and that letter has been given to Lawson, she, and you too, are at his mercy, and nothing I can do may be able to avert the mischief to follow.'

'Thank Heaven!' I exclaimed fervently, 'I have not to answer for that last mischance. Morton evidently proposed giving something to Lawson as he passed through the hall this morning, but my presence prevented him; and, to avoid any communication between them, I kept the fellow upstairs all the morning.'

'Yes; but he's had three-quarters of an hour to himself since we left the house. Let us go back at once.'

We hurried home, and, going into my room, I rung the bell for Morton at Fawcett's suggestion, while he was examining the door of the cabinet. He turned from it as Morton entered the room.

'Want the trap, sir?' he asked, and, as Fawcett nodded, he added: 'Do you wish me to drive, sir?'

'Yes, we must take you with us,' said Fawcett, advancing and quickly closing the door. 'I will tell you where we are going, Mr. Morton — to the police-station. I have a charge to make against you with regard to a bank-note for ten pounds. What is the number of that note, Doctor?'

'D.A. 5,678,' said I, looking at the paper in my notebook.

'Yes, that's it—D.A. 5,678, Morton; and also respecting a certain quantity of old gold and silver coins.'

'If you mean to insinuate, sir, as I have taken these articles, you will find that you have made a very great mistake,' answered Morton boldly, and then, with all the effrontery in the world, he produced a string of keys and added: 'There are my keys, Dr. Harvey—if you wish to search my boxes.'

With a quick snap Fawcett took the keys, examined them gravely, and then, selecting one, he went to the cabinet and unlocked the door.

'There is no necessity to search your boxes, Morton, for what is not there,' said he. 'It is not likely that you would be so foolish as to keep stolen articles there. This key is all the evidence we require. But the charge I have made against you is not the only one,' he continued, as he slipped the keys into his pocket, 'nor by any means the most serious one. You are perhaps aware that the law is very severe with regard to acts of felony that touch the post-office. Now, this morning the postman gave you three letters to deliver to your

master, one of which you have stolen. It is a square letter, addressed in a lady's hand—a hand that you know very well indeed, Morton, because it is the same which has addressed those letters you have carried so frequently of late from Miss Smith to Mr. Lawson.'

The fresh colour went from Morton's face, and a ghastly pallor took its place. For a moment he seemed as if he would stand on his defence, then, quailing before that unswerving eye of Fawcett's, which maybe recalled to his memory some past terrors of the witness-box, he broke down, and turning to me with piteous supplication in his voice and gesture, he stammered :

'I didn't know it was of value, sir. Upon my oath, I didn't, sir. You've been a good master to me, sir; and oh! for mercy's sake, don't turn again me now. I confesses all—I won't try to hide nothing from you, sir—no, not a thing, though I might. I did take the note, sir, and them coins and other little perkisites ; and you'll find 'em all, every

penny, and our savin's and all, in a box in the scullery copper flue.'

'The letter — give that up first,' said Fawcett.

'I can't, sir; I can't—I've give it to Mr. Lawson.'

'That's false,' said I. 'I prevented you. You haven't been out of the house since he was here.'

'Yes, I have, Lord forgive me! I've just been round to the Rising Sun, where he told me I should find him as he went out.'

CHAPTER XLV.

NOVEMBER TWENTY-NINTH—*continued.*

FAWCETT looked at me with raised eyebrows, and I at him, asking myself whether this statement of Morton's was to be believed. Catching the look of incredulity in my face, the fellow, still abject with fear, cried:

'It's true what I've told you, sir, as true as heaven! What's the letter to me?—worth nothink. Why should I tell you a lie about that when I've confessed about the other, which is, so to speak, money out of my pocket? Oh, do forgive me, sir!'

'If you hope for forgiveness,' said Fawcett, 'you must do something to deserve it. You have parted with that letter. You must get

it back again. Will you overlook his dishonesty, Doctor, if he restores the letter?'

'Yes; and he shall have the things he has stolen into the bargain.'

Morton's features were pinched up with strenuous purpose for a moment, then he said:

'I'll do it, sir. I'll have that letter back, if you'll only give me time to find Mr. Lawson.'

'You shall have till twelve o'clock to-night,' said Fawcett.

'And I may start about it now, sir?'

'This moment.'

Morton went off without another word, coming back two minutes later to show us that he was taking nothing with him but his hat and coat, and then departing in all haste.

'He'll get that letter,' said Fawcett, stroking his nose—'*somehow*,' he added, with a grim smile.

'What then?' I asked.

'The moment you know where Miss Smith is to be found, find her. Get her out of the way—across the Channel, anywhere—so that Lawson may not set his dogs upon her. For it seems to me more and more clear that she has reason to fear him.'

'But supposing Morton cannot get the letter before Lawson comes for St. John's reply—you gave him till midnight.'

'Well, when Lawson comes for his answer, you will simply tell him that you have not taken his offer to St. John. You were not bound to be a go-between, and it is not at all likely that he will put his threat into execution before he knows whether St. John accedes to his demand or not. At any rate, he can do nothing before to-morrow. That gives us time.'

'Yet, till then, it must seem as if we were wasting it.'

'Hum! Has Miss Smith any friends in London?'

'Not a soul that I know of.'

'That fellow Matthews is evidently one of those blackguard inquiry agents who take up any dirty work. But how did Lawson get the first information for the vagabond to act upon? That puzzles me. Is there anyone else behind, do you know?'

'Mere curiosity, I believe, first impelled him to make inquiries. Then he must have learnt something from Olive St. John that stimulated his growing interest in Mary. To confirm his suspicions, I think he advertised——'

'I know. "To anxious parents and guardians. Anyone requiring information with regard to a young lady who disappeared," etc. What makes you think that?'

'Why, an elderly man who called himself a solicitor came here one day to make inquiries about Mary, professing to be acting on behalf of her friends, and for her advantage.'

'And you said nothing to enlighten him, of course.'

'Nothing,' said I, with some satisfaction.

'Concluding that, as he is a lawyer, he must necessarily be a rascal. I suppose you did not take the trouble to find out his name?'

'He told me his name was Parsons.'

'Of Gray's Inn?'

'Yes; Salvador Chambers, if I remember rightly.'

'One of the leading members of the profession, and the most respectable man that ever took a brief. Wouldn't employ such a man as Matthews, or soil his hands with a dirty business like this for all the money Lawson could promise him. In all probability he was, as he represented, acting in behalf of Miss Smith, and you have done a nice piece of business, Dr. Harvey, in treating him as her enemy. Possibly you gave him the impression that you were a gentleman, and, believing your word, he abandoned further inquiry—the very man of all others who could get her out of this scrape. What sort of a man was he?'

I described the appearance of my visitor.

'Parsons himself,' said Fawcett. 'The case must have been one that interested him exceedingly — no beggarly scheme of persecution—to bring him all this way from Gray's Inn. I must try to undo the mischief you have made. Quarter to three,' looking at his watch. 'Train at twenty past—Holborn Viaduct nearly five—Gray's Inn just too late to catch him, unless something extraordinary has detained him.'

'We can telegraph,' I suggested.

'A practical suggestion for once!' cried he, jumping up. 'I will run across to the post while you get out the trap. I'll go to London at all hazards. If he is not at his office, I may hunt him up at his private residence.'

By the time I had brought the trap to the top of Mill Lane Fawcett was waiting.

'Get out,' said he brusquely. 'I'll drive. Send this affair back by a porter. You go in and look after your honest servants. Secure that money in the copper flue. Morton may think it advisable to bolt with that if he can't

get the letter back. If he does get the letter, send the address to me — Haxell's Hotel; sharp. Mind your toes.'

With that last injunction he lashed Bess, who, having learnt what to expect from such a driver, dashed off at an astonishing rate.

I thought his precautionary instructions with regard to the Mortons unnecessary, but I very quickly had proof given me of his wonderful perspicacity; for, just as I entered the front gate, whom should I meet face to face but Ann in her bonnet and waterproof, with something bulky sticking out beneath her arm!

Seeing me she stopped aghast; for doubtless she had watched me fetch the trap, had seen Fawcett pass quickly by the front gate, had heard Bess start off almost immediately after, and jumped to the conclusion that I had gone with him.

She stood there white and irresolute for a minute, but, putting on a bold face as I drew near, she said:

'Dr. Harvey, you've sent my husband away at a moment's notice, and as I don't understand such ill-treatment, I won't stay in your service another hour, and so I wish you good-afternoon, sir.'

'Stay,' said I, facing her as she attempted to pass me. 'What have you there under your cloak?'

'Nothing of yours, Dr. Harvey; and I suppose I am entitled to take my own linen away with me, though I am but a servant.'

'If there's nothing but your own you are welcome to it; but if there's anything of mine I shall give you and your husband in charge of the first policeman, who can examine you; and I shan't leave you till we meet one. So come along, if you will.'

She dared not go. For a moment or two the expression of her face wavered between impudence and despair, and finally, her hardihood forsaking her, she began to whimper.

'After all this dootiful service—and you such a kind master.'

'What have you under your arm?' I demanded sternly.

'Upon my word, I don't know, sir. It's only a box as James told me to fetch out of the chimbley and bring to him at the Rising Sun.'

'Show it to me.'

Reluctantly, and with an endless stream of falsehoods and prayers, she brought forth a box and suffered me to take it from her hands. I lifted the lid and spied a pair of old silver snuffers and their tray, and a half-open paper bag containing my lost coins.

'Go to your husband, you miserable ungrateful woman!' said I. 'Tell him what has happened, and dare not either of you come near the house till you can restore all that you have stolen from me. If the letter Morton took away this morning is not brought back to-night I shall instruct the police to arrest you.'

I took the box into the house, and the unhappy creature went her way whimpering—

for at the last I believe she was touched by some feeling of regret in going away from a home where she and her husband had been truly happy, and remorse for treating me so ill. But, indeed, I know not which of us was the more wretched—she in losing a master who had been kind to her, or I in losing the kindly feeling I had felt for them. For certainly one never gives a few pence to a beggar without experiencing a greater love for humanity, and to do a kindness to others is in reality to bless one's self.

And now here was I, absolutely alone in my house—not a creature to say a word to, for even lame Jack was away—gone to look for his mistress, I take it; and all so still and hollow that my own footstep seemed to have an uncanny sound in it. And surely never was I in sorer need of human society and the pleasant sound of a friendly voice, being so sick at heart with the wickedness of others, and, truth to tell, with my own follies. I had pinned my faith on servants who were

thieves. I had treated as a rascal this Mr. Parsons, who was an honest man, and Mary's friend ; and Mary herself had I conceived guilty of offences which she never committed. In truth I had ample reason to be ashamed of myself ; but I was galled none the less for that. It was a real relief when a porter from the station brought the chaise back, and I got him to help me take the pony out just for the sake of talking to him about nothing in particular, and as for Bess, I gave her such a rubbing down and feast of oats as she never had before, I do believe. But, lord ! the wretchedness of laying the cloth for my own dinner and sitting down to cold fragments in that cheerless room, with the fire out, and only one candle, for I knew not where to find the others, was such as I am not likely to forget for many a long day. Nor shall I forget, either, the feeling that wrung my heart and bedimmed my eyes when, on going into the next room, my eye fell upon the last flowers poor Mary had set upon the table

there. They were hanging their heads already, as if in grief. 'To-morrow,' thought I, 'they must be thrown away, and after that the vases must go empty, for the hand is gone that filled them for my delight.'

About seven o'clock the bell rang, and on going to the door I found there the coachman from Higham Court with a letter. I broke the envelope in fear and trembling, for I felt that nothing but ill could befall me that day; but it contained only a line from St. John, asking if I had received any tidings of Mary.

'Tell your master that I have no news,' said I. 'But it will be better, perhaps, that I write a note. Come in, my man. How are you getting on at the Court?' added I, as I got out my writing material.

'Why, sir, there's revolutions on, seems to me,' said he, grinning. 'Governor—I speak, sir, now of Mr. St. John—him and the young missus has been working out in the garden all the afternoon; fact, we've all been on the job

right up till it fell dark, clearing away the fences as the old governor—I speak now of Mr. Lawson—put up last year, to take in part of the flower-garden for growing useful things like cabbages and taters ; but lor', sir, you who knows what gardenin' is can understand that he never have got even a tater to grow there, and him so mean about a barrerful of manure. All the fence is down, sir. You should have seen Mr. St. John a-layin' into it with a haxe. If Mr. Lawson should come back I wonder what he'll say—that new fence that he was a-higgling and a-haggling six months over with Mr. Bates, the carpenter, 'fore he could screw up his courage to pay the price. I heard Mr. St. John and the young missus (and, lor', it does you good to see how chipper and joyful she is) a-talkin' about it—pointing out just how the garden used to be in the old times, 'fore Mr. Lawson had the grass plot and the flower-beds cleared away, and gravel laid down, 'cause it didn't cost so much to keep in order ; and I do b'lieve, sir,

they're goin' to lay it out just in the old style —years ago, when the old Colonel was alive. What do you think of that, Dr. Harvey?'

'Why, I think it's a famous job,' said I, rubbing my hands with glee, 'and I only wish I could be there to lend a hand. He shall have as many roses as he likes out of my garden, and it's not yet too late for transplanting 'em. And how does Mrs. Lawson take this business, for she must needs hear that axe going' (I myself seemed to hear the crash of that hateful green fence as it went down under the sweeping blow of St. John's stout arm), 'and must see her children at work down there from her window?'

'Well, I do hear, sir, from Maria, that the poor lady has been in a kind of twitter over it all day. Getting up from her books to go to the window, then walking about the room with her face in her poor, thin old hands, sort of taking on and crying, then going to the window again, as if she wanted to lift it and call to her children.'

'Ay, and she must, erelong, if she knows the work they are about.'

'She knows that, sir, for Maria told her, and it was that seemed to affect her so. 'Pon my word, sir, it do look wonderful hopeful like, and I most think as Mr. St. John's going to bring things round again into a comfortable condition.'

'Ah, to be sure! And so much the better for everyone. There, no need of a long letter. Take that to your master (and this for yourself) and come up betimes to-morrow morning, and let me know how you are going on.'

He went away with the letter in his hand, but before ten minutes had elapsed he returned, and with him Lawson.

CHAPTER XLVI.

NOVEMBER THIRTIETH.

'If you please, Dr. Harvey,' the coachman began in a tone of great indignation, 'I've come back to tell you——'

'That I've taken the letter you sent to St. John,' added Lawson. 'Wait here. Dr. Harvey will give you another.' Then turning to me as he pushed his way into the house, 'I must speak to you, sir, if you please.'

He himself led the way into my room, and then, shutting the door, he said:

'You have not been to the Court, and in this letter to Mr. St. John you have not mentioned the subject we were discussing this morning. What does that mean?'

'It means, sir, that I have no intention of offering the conditions you proposed to Mr. St. John, and in refusing to serve your purposes I am acting upon legal advice.'

'The advice of the "best lawyer in the country,"' he said with a sneer; 'that petty attorney, Fawcett. You are not aware, perhaps, that we have already discovered the hiding-place of Miss Smith?'

'Fully aware. The theft of her letter is discovered, and Morton has confessed that you received it from him — a felony for which you shall be punished, if for nothing else.'

'And knowing that it is in my power to have that woman arrested for murder within a couple of hours, you decline to make this effort to save her?'

'I do.'

'You doubt my intention to execute the threat? But by God I'll do it—if I gain nothing by it but revenge upon her for bringing me to this! My case is desperate, I

know. Then, for that reason, be careful how you goad me to extremities. I swear I will punish you.'

'If you can——'

'What, you think she is to be saved by such a lout as Fawcett?'

'By him and another, with whom at this very moment he is in communication. Do you know a lawyer named Parsons?'

At that name his jaw fell in consternation. Then, recovering himself, like a baited rat that turns in a corner from which there is no escape, in one fast, desperate attempt at self-defence, he said:

'If that is so, I must snatch my revenge while I may. She shall lie in a prison to-night—if you will do nothing to save her. For the last time I ask, will you send a message to St. John?'

'Yes,' said I, 'and you shall hear it.' With that I went to the front door, he following, and finding the coachman still there, I cried:

'Tell your master what has happened, and add that I have no news to send him.'

'Wait,' shouted Lawson. 'You shall have something else to tell him.'

He whistled, and old Matthews came out of the obscurity into the light, followed by his ally the 'policeman.'

'Take the next train to London,' said Lawson, addressing them, 'and serve that warrant. Arrest Mary Smith to-night, or you shall not get a farthing from me for your services. Go, both of you. And you also,' addressing the coachman, 'and repeat to Mr. St. John what you have heard.'

They went off, and he watched my face with strange anxiety to catch its expression by the light that came from the hall.

'Now,' said he, as the click of the latch showed that the men were passing the gate, 'while it is time, call back your messenger and I will call back mine.'

I thought of Mary, and my lips parted to call; then I thought of Fawcett and my past

follies, and I closed them with the determination to trust in him and act upon his advice.

'They are out of hearing,' he exclaimed in a tone of intense excitement. 'Say but a word and I will overtake them. What is your answer?'

'This,' said I, turning into the hall, and slamming the door in his face.

My limbs shook under me with conflicting emotions; I felt sick and faint with the apprehension that I had sealed Mary's fate. But I could not rest indoors—the air seemed close and suffocating. I rose from my seat and went out by the back door into the garden. It was quite dark now, the sky being overcast. Only a faint glimmer from the lamp at the corner of Mill Lane fell upon the garden hedge. Walking across the lawn, I stopped to inhale a deep breath of the fresher air that crept up from the weald. And while I was thus standing, I heard the crunch of footsteps in the lane and a voice speaking scarcely above a whisper. It was Ann's voice. I

recognised that, though the first words that reached my ear were unintelligible.

'True as heaven. He see her not half an hour ago.'

'Where ?' — and this second voice was Lawson's.

'I don't know, sir. He just told me to ketch you as you come out, and he run down the lane here, 'cause the Doctor's set the p'liceman to take him in charge for stealin' the letter.'

'Where is he now?'

'Just down here, sir, out o' sight. The Doctor might hear us talking if he was to come in the garden.'

They spoke no more in my hearing, and their footsteps faded away.

Who had Morton seen but half an hour ago—Mary? Should I follow, and try to overhear what he had to communicate to Lawson? I saw the inutility of such an attempt—Morton and Lawson being both on the alert, and having Ann for an outpost. Still I might

prevent their communicating—but only for a time. And then, was it a fact that Morton had seen Mary, or was this merely a ruse for drawing Lawson into a secluded place where they might by threats or force compel him to give up the letter? The latter supposition was most acceptable, and I resolved to let things take their course. But I waited anxiously for the sound of returning footsteps; and as I stood there listening, I thought I heard a distant cry for help—a muffled scream coming from the bottom of the hill, which, faint and indistinct though it was, smote my strained senses with a vague foreboding. There was no repetition of the sound, nothing save the church clock chiming the half-hour after eight broke the silence for a considerable space of time—three-quarters of an hour, as I judged—until a quick, light step in the lane intimated the return of Ann or Lawson. In anticipation of some fresh development I went into the house, and had scarcely crossed the threshold when the bell rang.

Ann was at the door, her face white as a sheet of paper against the black background. She panted for breath, and could not speak at first for agitation.

'Where is Lawson?' I asked.

'Down there,' she gasped, 'settling up with Morton. He wouldn't let us have the letter when we paid for it—and it's been a hard bargain—but I've got it.'

'Give it to me.'

She hesitated, just showing an envelope clenched in her hand.

'Morton says you promised him our savings—and the perquisites—if he got the letter.'

'There they are,' said I, pointing to the box which I had set on the hall sideboard; 'give me the letter, and take the things.'

She thrust the letter in my hands, and stepping up to the sideboard, seized the box, slipped it under her waterproof, and then, going back to the door, cast a hasty glance to the right and left, and ran forward, disappear-

ing almost instantly in the darkness, all without uttering a single word.

I hurriedly took the letter to the light. It was crumpled up and torn. One corner was gone, leaving a jagged semicircular edge, as though it had been bitten, and it was smirched with a dull red stain, as of mud and blood hastily wiped off. I noticed these things afterwards, my first glance when I had flattened the crumpled envelope being for the superscription. Yes; it was addressed to me, and in Mary's own hand. I drew out the folded sheet and opened it. The heading, fortunately, was intact, and there, to my complete stultification, I read: '16, Arlingford Terrace, Brixton.'

'What an old fool I must be!' thought I. 'I might have known that she would go there, where St. John took her, and she was known to the woman of the house.'

The rest of the letter occupied scarcely more space.

'Come to me as soon as you can, dear.—

Mary.' 'I am here under my former name—Miss St. John,' she added in a postscript.

I looked at my watch. The last up-train was due at Boro' Green in five minutes. To catch that was altogether out of the question. The time-table showed me that the latest train from Sevenoaks to London was due at 10.30. It was just possible to reach the station in that time, and there was always the possibility (this being the South-Eastern line) of the train being a quarter of an hour late. I got the stable-lantern, and scuttled down to get the trap out—but, Lord! the trouble I had to harness Bess. Whether it was due to the abundant feed of corn I had given her, or to a natural disinclination to go out again, after the rigorous treatment she had received at Fawcett's hands, I can't say; but certainly I never knew her so skittish and restive before, dancing round the loose box a full ten minutes before I could lay hold of her forelock, all the time lashing out with her heels, so that it was a marvel that she

did not catch me instead of my catching her.

'Never mind,' thought I, as I pushed her at last into the shafts; 'it's not so much amiss after all that she's so fresh and playful, for she will make up for lost time on the road.'

But here again I found myself wrong in my reckoning, the stubborn brute refusing to go at a speed beyond her ordinary dog-trot, and only at that by coaxing; for the whip in my hands was worse than nothing, as it only caused her to stand still and kick.

About midway betwixt the village and Higham Court I met the coachman on a saddle-horse.

'Are you going to the Court, Dr. Harvey, sir?' he asked, pulling up as he recognised me.

'No; to Sevenoaks, to catch the 10.30 train—if I can.'

'Mr. St. John sent me over to ask you to come to him, sir. He seems main put out by what I told him.'

'Give him this,' said I, handing him Mary's letter. 'He will understand why I cannot go to him.'

And with that I urged Bess onward again as best I could. But it was nearly eleven by the time I reached the station, and as luck would have it, the train that night had come in to the moment, and by this time might possibly have been four or five miles on its way to London.

There was nothing to be done but to wait at Sevenoaks for the first train the next morning, so I drove to the Sevenoaks Hotel, bade the hostler put up my pony, and myself went up to bed. But never a wink of sleep could I get for thinking of poor Mary—whom I saw in imagination confined in a cell of the police-station—and for fear of missing the train in the morning; and heartily glad was I when the boots knocked at my door and put an end to my troubles in this respect.

The train reached Cannon Street a little after eight, and thence I sent a telegram to

Fawcett, giving him Mary's address and bidding him meet me there without delay. Then I jumped into a hansom and drove to Brixton. With fear and trembling I knocked at the door of 16, Arlingford Terrace, scarcely hoping to find Mary there, and experiencing only a foreboding of ill news.

'Is Miss St. John at home?' I asked of the woman who opened the door.

'Yes, sir; will you step in?' She spoke with a complacent smile that indicated no astonishment or anxiety, no awed alarm such as I expected to see in her face. Was it possible that Matthews had failed to execute the order given him in my presence? I asked myself. Indeed, I could scarcely believe that I was not now to meet with another rebuff, until the woman opened the door of the little back room, and I found my dear Mary where I had first recognised her after the night of the accident.

Her breakfast lay on the table; there was a book beside her cup, and she was seated there,

the light falling sidelong on her shining hair and pale, long face, her dark fearless eyes turned towards the opening door in perfect composure. To see her thus one would have thought that her past life had been marked by no extraordinary vicissitudes, and that she had nothing to dread in the future.

But, seeing me, her look of calm indifference changed at once to one of delight, and springing to her feet, she came towards me with open arms.

'What has happened?' she asked eagerly, when I had kissed her, and the woman had closed the door.

'More than I can tell you in a word, my dear,' said I. 'St. John is a man again—he has done his duty.'

'Oh, I knew he would!' she exclaimed with fervour, 'and Lawson?'

'Wandering about—Heaven knows where—for he dare not go near the Court, and so far as his own fortunes are concerned his game is played out, and he is a ruined man. But his

vengeance is still to be feared. He has taken out a warrant for your arrest, and sent his agent to serve it. They should have taken you last night, but I suppose some technical difficulty prevented them. But they may be here at any moment, and so, for Heaven's sake, my dear girl, clap on your things, and let us get away while we may.'

'Have you had your breakfast?' she asked.

'My dear child, what on earth does that signify at such a time as this?'

'Oh, a great deal! Why, you look, dear, as if you had been travelling all night—quite ill and worn with fatigue and anxiety—and all for me, since Mr. St. John is himself again.' (She rang the bell). 'And if I may be taken at any moment, is there more danger half an hour hence than now? Come, be logical,' she added, smiling as the door opened. She ordered fresh tea to be brewed and toast made in the same even tone that she would order such preparations at home. 'And then,'

she pursued, as the door closed again, 'it might go against me terribly if it were proved that we rushed away to escape these men. No ; now we have accomplished what we had to do, I would rather face inquiry and stand upon my trial—even though it were possible to hide from justice.'

'My dear,' said I, 'you are braver than I—and better, too, I hope.'

My breakfast was brought in, and I sat down to it, answering Mary's many questions, and telling her candidly all that had taken place since her departure. But before my breakfast and my story were ended there came a loud ring at the bell, and as, raising my finger to enjoin silence, I leant my ear towards the door, I heard a peremptory voice in the passage asking if there was a young woman staying in the house named St. John.

'Yes, sir ; will you step this way ?' responded the woman, in the bland voice she had assumed in addressing the same words to me.

CHAPTER XLVII.

NOVEMBER THIRTIETH—*continued.*

Tap, tap. The door opened again, but instead of the officers of police that terror led me to expect, my friend Fawcett walked in.

'I am glad to find you here, Miss Smith,' said he, bowing to her respectfully.

'If she had listened to my advice she wouldn't be here,' I grumbled.

'Miss Smith did very much better to be guided by her own judgment.'

'Lawson instructed his agents to make the arrest last night. Had they acted promptly, where would she be now? What should we have done had they come instead of you?' I asked.

'Having already employed your sagacity to

such advantage,' added Fawcett, saluting me with a sneer. 'May I ask you for a cup of tea, Miss Smith? Dr. Harvey's telegram brought me away before I had quite finished dressing.'

Once more the bell was rung, and another order given for tea and toast.

'I only wish they may come,' Fawcett continued, dropping his gloves in his hat as he set it on the side-table. 'I should like nothing better than to encounter those Stamford Street scoundrels. As they have not served a warrant, the probability is they had none to serve, and that the instructions were merely given to frighten you, Doctor—an intention that succeeded admirably, I have no doubt. You are perfectly safe, Miss Smith—at least, for the present. It is not likely that a magistrate would issue a warrant on the mere *ipse dixit* of such rascals.'

'Well, what have you done, Fawcett? Have you seen Parsons?' I demanded impatiently.

'Strangely as our country justices do occasionally behave,' he added.

It was not until he had eaten a piece of toast and drunk a cup of tea that he answered my question.

'Yes,' said he, 'I saw Mr. Parsons, and we went into the case thoroughly, only stopping for the lack of information, not to be obtained last night. Tell me, Doctor, have you ever seen any notice of this—this inquiry in the newspapers?'

'Not a word. I must tell you, my dear,' said I, turning to Mary, 'that I felt it necessary to lay your case, as far as I knew it, before Fawcett, and without reserve.'

'And what does Mr. Fawcett conclude from your statement?' asked Mary quite calmly, as she refilled his cup.

'Nothing, madam. We wait for further information,' he replied.

'I should have thought you had enough information out of me yesterday to serve any reasonable purpose, Fawcett,' said I.

'Last night Mr. Parsons and I went systematically through a file of the *Times*, beginning at June 12th, but we failed to find any report of the death of the Hon. Clarence Spottiswoode or the subsequent inquest on his body. This was not extraordinary, the race-meeting and the railway disaster near Wayford crowding out slight matters on the 13th, and a long debate, with a speech of Mr. Gladstone's on the Irish question, filling out the paper on the following days. It was too late then to obtain a file of local papers, in which this event would certainly be dwelt upon. Mr. Parsons is probably at this very moment collecting the necessary facts from those papers, and as I have telegraphed your address to him, he will certainly come here and let you know what conclusions we are justified in forming from these data. And if other friends of yours, Miss Smith,' he continued, turning round to me, and looking over his glasses with severe reprobation into my face, 'had taken the same pains to ascertain

the extent of your danger in the beginning, very serious errors of judgment might have been obviated.'

'I never yet saw the advantage, and, I believe, never shall, of indulging one's morbid taste for details of distressing cases,' said I.

'You are fond of stories, I see,' said Fawcett, turning from me, and touching the open book that lay between him and Mary.

'Insatiably,' said she. 'I was reading when Dr. Harvey surprised me.'

'May I tell you a story I heard last night? We lawyers hear some curious ones at times.'

'Oh, pray let us hear it.'

'But supposing these fellows come—wasting time on idle stories!' I exclaimed impatiently.

Without taking the slightest notice of my objection, Fawcett began his story:

'About eighteen years ago a young cavalry officer, whom we will call Captain Richard Roe, was quartered in India. He had a young wife and one child—a girl, then about five years of age. They lived in very good style, mixed in

the best society, enjoyed every pleasure that was to be obtained, and were exceptionally happy. Mrs. Roe was particularly handsome, high spirited, and witty, and naturally received a great deal of attention from Captain Roe's brother officers and other gentlemen in the Residency. Amongst the latter was an Italian Consul, whose addresses to Mrs. Roe became so marked that her husband desired him to discontinue his visits. Returning unexpectedly one day from an expedition, the Captain found the Italian in his wife's drawing-room, and, seeing that stronger measures were necessary to protect his wife, he took the foreigner by the collar and summarily threw him out of the house. As a consequence of this proceeding, the Consul sent Captain Roe a challenge, and he, accepting it, was shot through the heart for his folly. Mrs. Roe—who, I may say at once, was perfectly innocent even of levity in her correspondence with the Italian—was so shocked with grief for the loss of her husband, whom she loved most fondly, and so over-

whelmed with remorse in the belief that she by some unguarded act had given her husband cause to doubt her honour, so convinced that he had died with that doubt, and through her came to his untimely end, that she lost her reason, and in her insanity put an end to her own life. The little girl, now an orphan, became the ward of the Captain's brother, Mr. James Roe, and another, whom we will call Mr. John Doe—these gentlemen being trustees of the considerable fortune left by Captain Roe to his sole heir—the little girl. Mr. James Roe was an easy-going, careless gentleman. Mr. John Doe was more energetic, and, as the event proved, unprincipled. Mr. Roe had unbounded faith in his friend John Doe—perhaps'—here Fawcett turned his eyes upon me—'because he did not choose to gratify morbid taste by inquiring into details, and one can readily see that he was only too willing to leave the duties of a trustee to be performed by the other.

'The little girl was delicate and fragile,

with the highly-strung temperament of her mother, and an intelligence abnormally developed for one so young. Her nervous condition gave some cause for alarm to the friends of her late parents, and a physician advised that she should be sent to England and placed in a home, where she would be less exposed to exciting influences than she was in the midst of a rather fast set of men and women. This agreed with Mr. John Doe's plans to a nicety. He charged himself with the duty of taking the child to England and finding suitable surroundings for her. The home he found was Ursula House, Upper Tooting.'

At the name of this place I looked across at Mary, for it was here, according to the cabman's statement, that she had been 'picked up.' Resting with her chin in the palm of her hand, Mary met Fawcett's scrutinizing gaze without moving a muscle.

'I have seen a prospectus and a quarterly report issued by the conductors of this house. It is just such a place as would be approved

by the physician who sent that little girl to England, and by other members of the medical faculty, I dare say,' turning sharply upon me. 'A spacious house standing in large grounds upon the edge of the common; perfect sanitary arrangements, vouched for by a properly qualified inspector; inmates accepted only on the recommendation of two eminent medical men, whose names are brought prominently before the public in connection with certain well-advertised condiments; a matron identified with many schemes of reform for the elevation of woman; trained nurses; public inspection invited; quarterly reports; a list of patrons as long as your arm, beginning with an earl and finishing with a bishop, and all the rest of it. If the absence of exciting influences was necessary to that little girl she would surely get it here—for except an occasional walk in procession upon the common, the inmates are never permitted to go outside the high walls that shut in the grounds of Ursula House.

But,' exclaimed Fawcett, with more passion than I had ever seen him exhibit, 'for a child of bright intelligence a more damnable prison was never invented, for those inmates who are not absolutely imbecile are such as are affected with hysteria and other nervous disorders.'

It was here, then, thought I, that Mary first became acquainted with the natures of these diseases.

'An ordinary child associated with such subjects would in the course of a few years become either idiotic or insane. And it was the perception of this result that led John Doe to incarcerate the little girl in Ursula House. He saw that in that condition his helpless ward might be kept confined for an indefinite period, during which he might manipulate her fortune as he desired. But, happily, Captain Roe's daughter was not an ordinary child, but one of quite extraordinary mental vigour, and she resisted the terrible influences to which she was exposed. Nay, I am disposed to think that the very horror of

sinking to the level of an imbecile or yielding to excitable tendencies strengthened her resolution and gave her a sum of self-command and self-restraint quite above the average of her sex. For she grew to womanhood there—endearing herself to all in the establishment except those who were governed by mercenary ends. Mr. Parsons, who has had several interviews with the attendants, finds that she kept her mind healthy by means of music, study, and reading—not the pabulum provided for the poor, half-witted creatures in her own position, but such light literature as the attendants lent her privately. The use of a piano and study were of course permitted her by the matron.

'Well, this state of things existed until last May. On the 24th of that month Miss Roe disappeared. A wall was under repair, and it is believed that by means of a ladder left outside by the workmen she was enabled to descend and make her escape—possibly with some adventitious aid. Search was

made for her, and when that failed the news was telegraphed to Mr. John Doe at Calcutta. By a curious coincidence, this man lay on his death-bed at the time, and the letter was handed to the other trustee, Mr. James Roe, the uncle. Eighteen years had not improved him. But an examination of his co-trustee's affairs led him to suspect that his niece had been victimized to serve James Roe's fraudulent designs ; and he found energy enough to telegraph at once to Mr. Parsons, in London, instructing him to inquire into the affair, and make what efforts were possible to find his missing niece. Mr. Parsons tried to find her, and failed—chiefly through the misleading honesty of a certain old doctor's appearance ; and, failing, he gave up the case. What do you think of this narrative, Miss Smith ? Does it seem to you a true story ?'

'Yes,' said she calmly, 'you have only to substitute the real name of that person for the supposed one, and call her Veronica Vane.'

'Mary!' I exclaimed, taking her hand in mine—'for you are still Mary to me—finish this story—tell me what is yet unexplained.'

But hereabouts it must have been, for Mary had certainly not answered my entreaty, the bell rang once more, and the new comer being ushered into the little room, I recognised in him my acquaintance, Mr. Parsons.

He bowed to me stiffly (with a not over-pleasant expression in his face), and then, turning to Mary—I never shall call her by another name than that—he said deferentially, 'Miss Vane, I believe?'

'Yes, that is my name,' said Mary, rising.

'Let me at once dispose of a doubt which, despite your fortitude, must have caused you much anxiety. You are exonerated from all blame in the death of Mr. Clarence Spottiswoode.'

'Thank God!' I murmured.

'Here is a copy of the *Surrey Argus*,' he continued, drawing a paper from his bag, 'which contains a full report of the inquest.

It will be sufficient for the present to read you a summary of the proceedings.'

He opened the paper and read :

'An inquest was held yesterday at the Rising Sun, Wayford, on the body of the Hon. Clarence Spottiswoode, who died under suspicious circumstances in a cab returning from the Derby. The cabman deposed to having taken the deceased gentleman from his chambers in London alone ; but stopping near Tooting, Mr. Spottiswoode picked up a young lady, who accompanied him thence to the races. Returning from the Downs, the cab stopped near Wayford, the road there being blocked by vehicles ; and at this point the cabman saw the young lady get out of the cab, hastily make her way through the line of carriages, and disappear. His suspicions being aroused by this strange proceeding, he opened the trap and, looking into the cab, perceived Mr. Spottiswoode huddled in one corner. Some pieces of gold upon the seat led him to suppose that his fare had been

hocussed and robbed, and getting down at once from his seat, he made a closer examination, and then came to the conclusion that Mr. Spottiswoode was dead. He drove to the police-station, and the inspector immediately sent for Dr. Tocher, of Wayford, and despatched a couple of constables in pursuit of the missing woman.

'The evidence of Dr. Tocher now proved that the deceased died from natural causes. There was no sign of any violence having been committed, nor of any drug having been administered. Examination showed beyond doubt that Mr. Spottiswoode suffered from a complication of disorders, and that the determining cause of death was heart disease. Closely questioned, the cabman admitted that he had hastily jumped at the conclusion that the deceased had been robbed and murdered, and had charged the missing young lady with these crimes without due consideration. He had seen the Hon. Mr. Spottiswoode fill her hands with gold as the result of a bet made in

her favour upon a winner ; he also admitted that she might have been perfectly unconscious of her companion's death, as he himself first thought he was asleep, and became convinced of his death only when he had felt Mr. Spottiswoode's heart. A verdict of death from natural causes was returned, the foreman of the jury, on behalf of his colleagues, wishing to have it publicly stated, for the satisfaction of the unfortunate young lady's relatives, that they acquitted her of any complicity in Mr. Spottiswoode's death.'

'Heaven be praised !' I exclaimed.

'There's no praise due to you, at any rate,' growled Fawcett.

'No praise ?' cried Mary. 'Why, it was he who saved me from death—rescued me from the carriage at the peril of his own dear life !'

Impulsively she took my hand and lifted it to her lips.

'Give me your hand, sir,' said Mr. Parsons. 'I was right after all ; and your face does not

belie your humanity. But permit me to read a few lines more :

'The romantic and perhaps the most tragic part of this affair is that the young lady, being apprehended on this hasty charge of murder and robbery, was sent on from the local police-station in the custody of two constables by the train subsequently wrecked near Wayford, in which fatal disaster she was undoubtedly destroyed, having been left handcuffed by the police in the compartment of the carriage next the break van, which, as we have shown elsewhere, was first crushed and burnt by the overturning engine of the express. A few charred remains have been recovered from the débris, but as yet no clue has been found as to the identity of this most unfortunate young woman.'

Two telegrams came from St. John, one within five minutes of the other. The first ran thus :

'No news from you yet. I received M.'s

letter last night. Pray let me know if all's well.'

The messenger was waiting. With Mary's sanction, I sent this reply :

' We shall be with you in a few hours, and better news remains to tell.'

The second telegram was less expected, and more startling :

' You are wanted. Lawson has been found dead in a ditch near your house, and your servants cannot be found.'

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONCLUSION.

'Miss Vane,' said Parsons, when he rose to go, 'will you allow me to communicate at once with your uncle in Calcutta?' And on receiving her assent to this proposal, he added diffidently: 'You are entitled to a very large fortune; but as you cannot very well obtain possession for some time, may I offer you any pecuniary advance to meet your immediate requirements?'

'Thank you. I don't think I need trouble you,' said she, adding, as she turned to me with a smile, 'if Dr. Harvey will still allow me to keep my position as his housekeeper.'

We took the next train to Boro' Green. On the way I gave Fawcett particulars of the

manner in which I obtained Mary's letter, the behaviour of the Mortons, the condition of the letter when I received it from Ann, and her terror-stricken condition at that time.

'They must have got him down and taken it from him by force,' he said. 'Probably they did not intend to murder him, but in stifling his cries or in gripping his throat, to make him open his mouth—for it's pretty clear by that torn corner that he had some idea of swallowing it — they accidentally strangled him. We had better go straight from the railway-station to your friend the Inspector, and give him full information.'

'This is not a pleasant business for you to take part in, my dear,' said I, turning to Mary. 'I should advise you to hire a fly and go home, but there's no one there to wait on you, and the place is all upside down.'

'The greater reason for my going, to set it straight,' said she.

Accordingly, matters were arranged in this way.

'It's a case of murder; there's no doubt about that,' said Geddes, when Fawcett had given him the necessary information. 'The parish doctor says he was strangled, and he looks like it, I tell you, sir. Most unpleasant corpse—soaked with mud, and his clothes torn half off his back. Not a stiver left in his pockets, so you can't make it out anything less than robbery with violence. I've got two parties arrested on suspicion; and as they're, as you may say, old acquaintances of yours, Doctor, perhaps you'd like to cast an eye on 'em.'

He took us to the cells, and there, looking through the grating in the doors, we perceived old Matthews in one and the cabman in the other, each with a most wobegone look on his face.

'Rascals!' chuckled Fawcett; 'keep them tight, Mr. Inspector.'

'No fear of that, sir; but as to those other parties, I doubt but that, being old hands, as no doubt they are, they'll give us the slip.'

(And, indeed, this prognostication has been verified, for up till now neither Morton nor his wife has been captured.)

'The inquest will be held to-morrow, and you will be summoned as a witness, I dare say,' said Geddes as we left him.

Fawcett returned to the station and I went home, where I found that Mary had set to work with characteristic energy, and made the house as cheerful in that short space of time as before it had been wretched. Ay, she had even found time to refill the vases with flowers, and to see this and my dear Mary standing there again, bright and helpful as I have ever known her, filling the place with a happy light by her presence, my heart leapt up with joy. But the next moment it sank, and lay like lead in my breast.

'What is it, dear?' she asked, seeing the change in my countenance, as she slid her arm round my neck. 'What is it?'

'I am thinking, my dear, how I have

misjudged you at times—how lightly I have appreciated all the joy you have given me.'

'But you understand your little sister now. What else?' she asked, seeing me still downcast.

'I am thinking, dear, that the vases will stand empty again erelong, and that the little sister will be taken from me.'

The colour mounted to her cheek as she pressed it to mine and murmured :

'Whatever happens, dear, I will never go far away from you.'

And that which I dreaded, yet hoped for more, has come to pass. She has flown like a song-bird from its broken cage in the spring-time at the call of its mate. She is St. John's wife now, and the vases are empty, and the house so still and silent!

THE END.

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